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## Barriers to Teacher Collegiality

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Strong and healthy collegial relationships among educators is believed to be a vital element in enhancing school effectiveness and school improvement. Numerous benefits from teacher collegiality have been reported as evidence of the need for building a more effective collegial culture in schools. Regrouping among teachers to promote collaboration in teaching and new configurations of teacher collegiality constitute integral parts of constructive schools (Johnson, 1990). However, in spite of its numerous benefits, collegiality is still a rare element in most schools (Bruffee, 1999; Heider, 2005). This article elucidates some of the common barriers to collegiality among school teachers.

The literature on teacher professional collegiality has consistently cited a number of prevailing barriers to meaningful interactions (see e.g., Dipardo, 1997; Knop et al., 1997; Kruse & Louis, 1997; Leonard, 1998), among them the most repeatedly highlighted are: time constraints, fragmented visions, competitiveness, conflict avoidance, and lack of administrative support (Dipardo, 1997; Friend & Cook, 2000; Johnson, 1990; Knop et al., 1997).

Johnson (1990) in her research cited the structure and organization of schools themselves as inhibiting factors to teacher interdependence and collaboration. Bureaucratic restraints, such as scheduling issues, often inhibit the development of collegiality among staff. Some administrative practices also discourage cooperation among teachers, especially those that emphasize competition (Johnson, 1990).

School size also acts as hindrance to collegiality. Teachers in smaller schools are more likely to collaborate with one another (Nathan, 2002) and participate in teamwork (Galletti, 1999). Lee and Smith (1996) argued that, although collaboration is possible in larger schools, collective learning occurs more easily and naturally in smaller schools.

Similarly, teachers' varied personalities and beliefs also pose a unique challenge to building effective collegiality. Teachers have their own ideas regarding effective teaching and learning; however, collaboration requires all faculty members to come to a consensus regarding their beliefs and goals (Kruse, 1996). For getting consensus, they need to trust each other. Until trust is built among them and a consensus has been met on the school's vision, isolation and separate agendas will continue to prevent teachers from working together (Schmoker, 1999), and becoming lifelong learners (Leonard & Leonard, 1999). Teachers must also have a belief in the relationship between individual success and collegial success, and must share common interests (Kruse, 1996).

Diez and Blackwell (2002) and Bezzina (2006) state that as teachers are trained to work independently in their classrooms, they are unwilling to relinquish some of their autonomy for successful collaboration. Tschannen-Moran (2001) also suggested that teachers must sacrifice some of the autonomy they value so highly in order to reap the potential benefits of greater collegiality and collaboration.

The most prominent barrier to shared work activity among educators is the ubiquitous issue of time (Friend & Cook, 2000). Successful collaborative planning, consultation, and evaluation require a major time commitment. The study conducted by Leonard and Leonard (2003) pointed out that teachers did

not think it appropriate that they should be expected to utilize after-school time for collaborative activities. In their research, the major barriers to collegial activities mentioned by teachers included paucity of time, apparent attitude and lack of commitment by teachers, lack of compensation, resistance to change, competition, and lack of interest in doing things differently. The participants of their study talked of teachers who wished to avoid additional work as well as those who prefer “to work alone” and stay in their “comfort zone”. References were also made to “resistance to change”, “competition” among teachers for high test scores, and a genuine “lack of interest” in doing things differently and creatively. Other noted barriers to collegial opportunities included tight scheduling (especially in smaller schools), teacher personality conflicts, and lack of administrative support (Leonard & Leonard, 2003).

Leonard and Leonard’s (2003) study recommended the following for improved administrative support for building collegiality: scheduling that would better facilitate teacher interaction during the day, arranging for team teaching, providing substitute teachers to free up teachers to work together, organizing classroom allocations more effectively, providing directives and incentives for after school work, and setting stronger expectations that teachers actually collaborate in meaningful ways. For building an effective collegial culture, principal support is critical; however, collaboration cannot be mandated, only supported.

Guskey (2003) argued that school reform requires staff development built around groups of teachers working together to share ideas and strategies and reflecting on their practice. The development of teaching teams in which teachers get time to collaborate, forms the core structure in schools that achieve successful systemic reform (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Supovitz (2002) also identified the need for adequate training to prevent teacher isolation and improvements in teachers’ learning instructional practices from each other.

Lewis (2004) in his study of teacher collaboration, noted teachers complaints of lack of formal planning time, lack of technological resources, and lack of involvement by the principal which mostly interfered with the continuation of their collaboration.

Howe (2007) in his study of an academy of a large urban high school, highlighted physical layout of schools, external demands, lack of professional development, and weak administrative footprint as the major challenges to collegiality among school teachers. Howe (2007) also regarded smaller school size as more effective in building collegiality among school staff.

An understanding of collegiality among educators is necessary in an era of continuous change and improvement. School leaders and teachers must be aware of the obstacles that prevent collegiality to occur among teachers if teacher professional enhancement and organizational wellbeing is desired. School principals and administrators must discover methods for promoting collegiality among their staff as interventions to prevent isolation could be structually planned. Teachers must be provided with greater opportunities and enough time in order to assist them in developing their interpersonal relations within schools’ settings as well as with educators outside their school premises. Competition among teachers should be discouraged and teachers who involve themselves in teamwork should be appreciated. Teachers, on the other hand, need to open up their minds and alter their views about teaching. They must consider it as a less private and individual practice and need to admit that the knowledge of their teaching by themselves as well as by their colleagues is essential for their professional wellbeing. Teachers should adopt team teaching as a strategy to improve their instruction

and must be open in sharing their expertise, experiences as well as challenges.

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