An Exploration of Teacher and Staff Collaboration during Elementary School Action Teams

by

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and Middles Grades Education

Teacher collaboration has become an essential component of an elementary school. Student achievement, content area and pedagogy, and school relationships are some benefits that result from teacher collaboration. Five action teams (Staff Morale/Sunshine, Student Leadership, Technology, PBIS, and Clubs) are used at Stephens Elementary School to collaborate and accomplish goals for the school. This mixed methods study used a non-experimental descriptive design and examined the perspectives of 24 elementary teachers and staff regarding collaboration in their respective action teams. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected from an online survey and analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis, a priori coding, and open coding. Analysis revealed themes of perceptions on collaboration in action teams, benefits of collaboration, barriers to collaboration, and suggestions for future collaboration. Findings from this study revealed implications for administrators and participants regarding action teams.

An Exploration of Teacher and Staff Collaboration during Elementary School Action Teams

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I would like to thank my family and loved ones for providing me with the opportunity to gain this tremendous education and the necessary tools to succeed in life. Thank you for the continued support throughout my educational career. I would like to thank my work family and students for supporting me and being my cheering section along the way.

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Introduction

This paper presents a mixed methods study that aimed to explore teacher and staff collaboration that happens within an elementary school setting during action team meetings. Collaboration, one aspect of teacher leadership, has multiple impacts on schools, including positive impacts on student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Other impacts of collaboration are improving teacher pedagogy (Briscoe & Peters, 1997), meeting the needs of students (Ronfeldt, Farmer, Mcqueen, & Grissom, 2015), and trust and respect among staff (Schneider & Kipp, 2015).

Working together can be defined in different ways depending on who it encompasses. Collaboration can occur between teachers, students, administration, communities, and other school support staff. Teacher collaboration is one of the most influential ways to build rapport between staff, students, and the community (Porter, 1987). Action teams can involve staff in what is happening and allow them to include their opinion on the decisions being made within their school (Jordan, 1999). Collaborating allows for general education teachers, special educators, and support staff the chance to create relationships in their professional environment that can be enriching and lasting relationships (Gable, Mostert, & Tonelson, 2004).

At Stephens Elementary School (pseudonym), teachers and staff (e.g., administrators, instructional coaches, social workers, counselors, specials teachers, and exceptional children teachers) collaborate in action teams once a month to discuss and implement ways to improve the school in a variety of areas. Teachers, staff, and administrators are divided into five different teams: Staff Morale/Sunshine, Student Leadership, Technology, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Clubs. The school leadership team identified these action teams based on what they deemed the school needed and what would best support the school's mission. The school's mission is that they are a family that seeks to create responsible citizens and lifelong

learners who achieve academic excellence, personal growth, and success in a safe, positive, and diverse environment. Each action team requires teacher collaboration in order to accomplish its specific, unique responsibilities provided in the mission statement within the school.

The Staff Morale/Sunshine action team organizes and implements monthly staff morale boosters, staff appreciation events, and holiday celebrations. The Student Leadership action team identifies student leadership opportunities within the school, engages the school and specific grade levels in community service projects, communicates with teachers and staff, selects student leaders, and coordinates times for students to participate in various activities. The Technology action team updates and maintains the school website, communicates important information through social media, and identifies technology tools and best practice strategies for technology integration in the classroom. The PBIS team ensures that the Tier 1 PBIS systems are in place, reviews discipline data monthly, troubleshoots problem areas, and communicates PBIS best practices for staff throughout the year. The PBIS action team is the only team required to have a representative from each grade level in order to most effectively communicate. The Clubs action team organizes and implements multiple clubs throughout the schoolyear, such as Jr. Beta Club, Battle of the Books, Student Council, Girls on the Run, Coding, Robotics, and Boys Club.

Through my studies in teacher leadership, I have been intrigued about how teacher collaboration can be used in an elementary school in order to impact the school community. In the previous academic year, Stephens Elementary School was identified as a low performing school, a devastating moment for the teachers, staff, and administration. However, this was also a defining moment for the school, and administrators and teachers focused on how they could improve the school in as many ways as possible. For the current school year, the leadership team decided to reduce the number of action teams from eight to five in order to best utilize

collaboration and maximize growth in the school as a community, learning environment, and an academically successful school.

Due to my background knowledge of collaboration and my varied experiences during my teaching career, I decided to concentrate my research on teacher and staff collaboration within elementary action teams. Thus, this study investigates the following research question: How do elementary teachers and staff describe their collaboration within their respective action teams? Investigating this question allows me to determine how the teachers and staff feel about the action teams and collaboration currently in place. Additionally, I investigated the way people perceive collaboration within the school and the possible ways this information can be used to improve the school collaboration for future school years. The findings of this study will inform administrators and participants about the current level of collaboration within action teams and concepts to consider for future action teams.

Literature Review

Before conducting research on collaboration in elementary school action teams, it is important to first analyze the different aspects that are involved. The following literature review will address these aspects. First, I define collaboration in the elementary schools. Next, I investigate the meaning of an action team. Then, I discuss the importance between collaboration and its role in an action team. Finally, I discuss the paucity of research on professional collaboration.

What is Collaboration?

Collaboration can be defined in numerous ways depending on the situation in which it is being used. "Collaboration underpins how we structure and conduct most of our work, serve students, and learn and grow as professionals" (Vincente, 2017, p. 34). Collaboration for teachers is working together as a staff, community, or team in order to fulfill the school's mission, and it serves as an important part of elementary teacher and staff relationships (Gable et al., 2004). There is some concern that not every educational institution maintains teacher collaboration in their schools (Briscoe & Peters, 1997; Goddard et al., 2007). Briscoe and Peter (1997) discussed that, "sustained collaboration is not easy. This is evidenced…by the fact that within-school collaborative relationships did not even form among teacher-participants unless they shared grade levels" (p. 63). Ten years later, Goddard and colleagues' (2007) found the same phenomenon where not all teachers had the ability or opportunity to collaborate despite the possibility for improving instruction.

Vincente (2017) describes the link between teacher improvement and student achievement, emphasizing the strong relationships that it can help enrich. Multiple researchers have also found collaboration has a positive impact on both teacher improvement and student improvement (Gable et al., 2004; Goddard et al., 2007; Vincente, 2017). Not only does fostering

teacher learning progress teachers' conversations within their teams, but it can also help foster student achievement.

Collaboration can be one way to facilitate teacher improvement by bouncing ideas off other colleagues when the school has an issue or situation that needs attending to (Sundstrom, Meuse, & Futrell, 1990). One goal of a teacher is to continue to grow as an educator and not stay stagnant in educational experience. Coworkers who collaborate and become friends can experience higher levels of productivity when working together (Hargreaves, 2019).

When educators collaborate, the focus can be placed on new types of instructional strategies (Vincente, 2017). Collaboration can help lead to new instructional strategies by completing teacher-to-teacher talk (Vincente, 2017). These innovative instructional strategies can then be implemented in schools and classrooms. Further, collaboration can provide multiple rewards, such as satisfaction in their job or the ability to improve their classroom practice based on their analysis of the classroom (Briscoe & Peters, 1997).

As the educational system continues to evolve to include more advanced curriculum and technology, there is an emphasis on professional collaboration and its potential impact on student outcomes (Gable et al., 2004). There is a resulting pressure on schools to continuously improve their services, and collaboration is an important factor behind these improvements (Gable et al., 2004).

What is an Action Team?

"Action teams are defined as teams in which members with specialized skills must improvise and coordinate their actions in intense, unpredictable situations" (Sundstrom et al., 1990, p. 122). Action teams can appear differently depending on the area in which they are being used. For instance, Handelzalts (2019) outlines collaborative teams as Teacher Design Teams

(TDT) that work together to design their curriculum. When compared to Stephens Elementary School, action teams are used to collaborate to insure they are covering tasks or matters needed for improvement in their school. Edmondson (2003) concluded that sometimes staff are presented with intense, unpredictable situations that action teams must respond to. Staff must take the information agreed upon during the action teams to implement the action needed in response to the events.

The concept of action teams was developed by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL):

> SEDL's experience revealed the need for a well-defined planning process that allows community teams to determine their most important needs, agree on how to address them, and plan and implement projects. At the same time, members needed to develop strong relationships to help them become an effective team. As a result, SEDL has designed a Collaborative Action Team (CAT) process with team planning and team building activities as its linchpins. (Jordan, 1999, p. 50)

The original idea behind collaborative action teams was to create involvement to establish a school that was defined as a community school (Jordan, 1999). This connects not only the community surrounding the school, but the community within the school. Jordan continued to note that the collaborative process and tools that were developed by SEDL allow schools and communities to learn team building, team planning, and momentum generation skills. Stephens Elementary School's views align with Jordan's (1999) view in that they view the school as community, and collaboration will help strengthen the community in the school for the 21st century.

When members of an action team come together, they work as a team in order to plan and implement projects that are needed in the school. “An Action Team should be a group of friends. Better yet, it’s a family who desire to accomplish individual goals to fulfill the group’s purpose” (Morales, 2019, para. 4). Morale’s (2019) ideas aligned with Jordan’s (2019) discussion in that the staff work together in order to accomplish the tasks that are needed for their school. Action teams have building elements where team members work together as equal partners, build trust, and respect diversity in order to solve problems and create new opportunities (Jordan, 1999).

There are three main elements which school leaders should focus on when developing action teams: a) the characteristics of the organizing group, b) school system influences, and c) overall community culture (Jordan, 1999). First, when considering the characteristics of the action team, members of the action team should understand their purpose. More specifically, members should understand the importance of time and actions that will take place during their group meetings. Teams whose members understand their expected level of commitment can make steady progress (Jordan, 1999). The second component is school system is influenced within the school and district. The administration and district being supportive or not of action teams and the decisions that need to be made during the meetings is important. **“**The ways a superintendent's office shows support for the collaborative team and its work can make or break the whole effort” (Jordan, 1999, p. 52). The final feature is the culture of the community and its level of influence and support. This factor involves the attitudes and values of the community and how supportive they are with the partnership of the school (Jordan, 1999).

SEDL's process includes five stages that are important in developing and creating these specific action teams: a) identification, b) mobilization, c) project development, d)

implementation, and, e) evaluation (Jordan, 1999). During the first stage of team identification, it is determined who will be on the team and how they will work together to represent the whole community. The second stage is team mobilization in which a vision, mission, and priorities for the school and team are decided upon. During the third stage of project development, the team members create action plans. The fourth stage is project implementation in which team members carry out the action plans and maintain the team's focus while accomplishing its goals. Lastly, the team conducts a project evaluation to assess the results of their actions (Jordan, 1999). The five stages include elements designed to help build strong teams with the possibility to collaborate successfully for their needs. (Jordan, 1999).

The Importance of Collaboration for Teachers

Collaboration should lead to an educational institute that works smoothly and flows together well. As Jordan (1999) discussed, collaboration is significant to make sure that the school is working together as a community. Dagostino (2013) found that creating professional collaborative relationships and maintaining them helps create a positive environment where student support teams can work collaboratively to encounter the needs of their students. Further, continuing professional development can result in both learning and change (Forte & Flores, 2014). Collaborating with peers provides "multiple opportunities for learning both content and pedagogy that would support their teaching" (Briscoe & Peters, 1997, p. 63). Professional learning communities provide opportunities for teachers to improve their practice as educators using dialogue and shared practice (Battersby, 2019). Porter (1987) found that this frequent conversation amongst peers allows them to collaborate while engaging in professional development.

In a recent study by Bush and Grotjohann (2020), many first year and pre-service teachers did not find an importance in collaboration, but other veteran teachers found collaboration and communication more beneficial to their careers. Due to these findings, Bush and Grotjohann (2020) recommend that universities should start teaching the importance of collaboration within the education system. The exchange that transpires during teacher collaboration can add to many of their upcoming careers. “Exchange is the most highly rated and most intended form of collaboration” (Bush & Grotjohann, 2020, p. 8). This study shows the importance of collaboration for younger teachers compared to veteran teachers.

Reflective dialog could possibly foster improved understanding for their profession and would in turn promote mutual trust and respect (Schneider & Kipp, 2015). Schneider and Kipp’s (2015) research showed that professional collaborations could positively impact professional growth in order to become a smooth flowing education system. This research supports decisions by teachers and administration to collaborate on different aspects of their jobs.

Collaborative relationships are replacing the existing teacher relationships in schools (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Collaborative relationships are also important to the elementary school staff who are working together in the school in that it allows them the ability to have constructive dialogue with each other on the messier parts, as well as the positive aspects, of the profession (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

Schools with greater collaboration, and educators who are improved collaborators, can show greater gains in student achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). In order to test the impact of collaboration on student achievement, collaborative lesson research has been conducted (Takahashi & Mcdougal, 2016). This research shows that teacher collaboration within the schools is allowing for further student growth with new Common Core mathematics standards.

In continuation of collaboration on student achievement, Constantinou and Ainscow's (2019) research discusses that alterations needed in schools begin within the educational system using collaboration as one of its key components.

Collaboration Within Action Teams

An action team's organization can be an influential tool. "A team's organizational context can provide resources and slack in its schedule to support practice, experimentation, and reflection on what works, all fostering learning and improvement" (Edmondson, 2003, p. 1425). Constructing collaboration with the strengths already in place and focusing more on those struggling groups can be influential in building collaboration in the school (Lockton, 2019). If the action team is struggling to produce decisions and complete the information that is needed for their groups, team members may need additional collaboration between the teammates. This is an aspect that can be focused on during the action team meetings in order to ensure that the leaders are helping to provide the type of collaboration that their group may require (Lockton, 2019).

Teacher beliefs regarding the expectations of their school leaders is significant for the types of interactions in collaborative teams (Lockton, 2019). Action teams often involve administration and district representation to show support for their staff and the team's decisions. The support of the administration can greatly enhance any collaborative team (Jordan, 1999). Team members must be able to work together successfully and that may require some intervention by the school leaders (McEwan, Ruissen, Eys, Zumbo, & Beauchamp, 2017).

Collaboration is favorable when focused on instructional fields such as curriculum and teaching strategies (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Ronfeldt and colleagues' (2015) data supports schools' implementation of action teams focused on collaboration with strategies to ensure they

receive the full knowledge needed in schools. Schools with higher student achievement gains had teachers who were strong collaborators in a secure collaborative environment (Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

Lack of Research on Professional Collaboration

There is a paucity of empirical research published on the implementation, effects, and benefits of professional collaboration (Banerjee, Stearns, Moller, & Mickelson, 2019; Gable et al., 2004; Kennedy & Stewart, 2011); rather, "a disproportionally greater amount of attention has been given to how collaboration occurs (process), with far less attention given to the results of those collaborative efforts (outcomes)" (Gable et al., 2004, p. 5). Seven years later, Kennedy and Stewart (2011) noted that they were only able to find four studies in which the professional collaboration was documented; thus, specific strategies to promote collaboration were considerably less documented. More recently, Banerjee and colleagues (2019) made the case that few studies have identified the relationship between student achievement and teacher satisfaction in their job. The need for research on professional collaboration is evident based on this trend.

In an attempt to address this gap in the research, Gable and colleagues (2004) researched professional collaboration within elementary schools and its impact on bringing teachers closer together by documenting when teachers met and the time period the collaboration continued afterwards. They discussed that while teachers were more involved in collaboration, there was a discrepancy between the reason behind collaboration and what happens with collaboration within schools. They also found a connection between the teacher as a stakeholder and the collaborative process.

We believe that successful collaboration is most likely to occur when all participants are able to evaluate every collaborative process and outcome across the entire life of the

> collaborative exercise. Therefore, what follows is a model for assessing professional collaboration in schools across (a) the collaborative process and (b) the stakeholders involved in all levels of the collaboration. (Gable et al., 2004, p. 6)

The teachers who are involved in the process of professional collaboration, and in helping to create it, are more likely to continue contributing to the process of collaboration in their workplace (Gable et al., 2004).

Investigating possible causal relationships between collaboration and student achievement, Ronfeldt and colleagues (2015) provided a descriptive analysis of teacher collaboration. They found there was little known "about the current social-institutional landscape of teacher collaboration across teachers and schools" (Ronfeldt et al., 2015, p. 477). They studied the few existing large-scale descriptions and found that they suggested there is wide variation in teachers' collaborations. "Existing literature is also silent about the role of the larger school environment in shaping the relationship between teacher job dissatisfaction and student achievement" (Banerjee et al., 2019, p.204). Each of these researchers identified a gap in the literature involving teacher job dissatisfaction and student achievement.

In this review of the literature, I defined collaboration and action teams. I outlined the importance of collaboration for teachers and the role collaboration plays within action teams. Finally, I explored the paucity of research on professional collaboration after it is implemented.

Methodology

This mixed methods study is designed to investigate the following research question: How do elementary teachers and staff describe their collaboration within their respective action teams? The quantitative component follows a descriptive, comparative design, and the qualitative component follows a case study approach. Data were collected using a survey with both quantitative and qualitative questions and were analyzed to identify teachers' perceptions of their current collaboration in action teams.

Setting

The setting of the study took place at Stephens Elementary School in a rural area of the MidAtlantic United States. The county is an agricultural area with some struggling mills and furniture factories that are remnants of the previous economy of the county. There are seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school in the county. The area is a high poverty area with many families who are in the lower income or working-class brackets, with some in the middle-class socioeconomic status. (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d)

Stephens Elementary School was founded in the 1970s and was destroyed in a fire in 1982. The school has since been rebuilt with multiple additions in order to accommodate the ever-growing rate of students from the growing population of the county. There are approximately 500 students at Stephens Elementary School, of which approximately 70% receive free or reduced lunch. There are 67 teachers and staff and the current average class size is approximately 21 students per class. While Stephens Elementary School was a lower performing school in previous years, the classification was recently removed.

This study focused only on the teachers' and staff's perceptions who are involved in the five action teams at the school; therefore, this research does not involve any student subjects. The study focused on teacher and staff collaboration within the action teams. The principal

agreed to provide the background resources he used when developing the action teams. The principal granted permission for this study (see Appendix A) and provided resources, such as information on each specific action team. The assistant superintendent of the county agreed that, after approval of the IRB, permission was granted to conduct the study at Stephens Elementary School.

Participants

There are currently 33 people involved in the action teams at Stephens Elementary School, but since I could not participate in my own survey, I removed myself from the invitation list. Thus, 32 teachers and staff (e.g., administrators, instructional coaches, social workers, counselors, specials teachers, and exceptional children teachers) were invited to participate in the survey. These teachers, staff, and administration are a part of five action teams that are in place at the school.

A total of 24 elementary teachers and staff (see Table 1) participated in the survey. The participants' years of professional experience spans from less than one year to more than 16 years of teaching experience at their current school. Half of the respondents have been teaching at their current school for three years or less. Half of the teachers have a bachelor's degree and half of the participants hold a master's degree. Three-fourths of the staff hold an elementary education degree with the other 25% holding a physical education, special education, or other degree. All five action teams were represented in the participant pool. Approximately two-thirds of the participants who replied were on their first to third year in their action team with the other third being four years or more.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Characteristic	*n**	Valid %

Action Team		
Technology	3	12.5
PBIS	6	25.0
Student Leadership	3	12.5
Clubs	8	33.3
Staff Morale/Sunshine	4	16.7
Years on Current Action Team		
1 Year	7	29.2
2 Years	2	8.3
3 Years	7	29.2
4 Years	2	8.3
5 or More Years	6	25.0
Years at Current School		
1 Year	5	20.8
2 Years	3	12.5
3 Years	4	16.7
4-5 Years	2	8.3
6-8 Years	5	20.8
9-12 Years	1	4.2
13-15 Years	1	4.2
16 Years or More	3	12.5
Highest Degree Held		
Bachelor's degree	12	50
Master's degree	12	50
Type of Teaching Certificate		
Elementary Education	18	75
Physical Education	1	4.2
Special Education	2	8.3
Other	3	12.5

n: total number of participants who responded*

Research Procedures

For this study, a mixed method research design was implemented, and data were collected through use of a survey. The survey was researcher-created and included both quantitative and qualitative questions. The participants were selected based on their participation in one of the five action teams that are present within Stephens Elementary School. After IRB (see Appendix B), district (see Appendix C), and principal approval (see Appendix A), 32 teachers, staff, and administrators were invited to participate in the survey. At a faculty meeting, I introduced and explained the survey (see Appendix D for script), including the format of the

survey, the purpose of the study, what the data would be used for, and the level of anonymity. Within 24 hours, I emailed the teachers and staff with a link to the survey. The consent form (see Appendix E) was located at the beginning of the survey in order to gather the participants' consent and inform them they were not required to participate. I requested the staff complete the survey within two weeks and a reminder was sent after exactly one week.

After the two-week window concluded, 27 out of 32 participants had started the survey. I exported the survey responses from the Qualtrics survey program and imported them into SPSS software. One participant did not answer any questions and two participants only answered the demographic questions. Thus, I excluded these three participants. Three participants partially completed the survey questions; I included these participants' data because they shared important information about the participants' perceptions of collaboration. In total, there were 24 participants who completed all, or a majority of, the survey for a response rate of 75%.

I was the sole researcher in this survey. In order to prepare myself in this role, I completed the CITI training in social/behavior research investigators that is required by the university (see Appendix F). I was the only person who implemented this survey and the only person who needed preparation for this study. I was completely responsible for creating the survey, sending it, receiving results, and analyzing the data from the survey using the Qualtrics program. There were not any monetary costs needed for implementing the study.

Reliability and Validity

I used multiple strategies when creating my survey in order to strengthen the reliability. First, I used a mixed methods survey to provide teachers the opportunity to respond in multiple ways and to explain those responses. I then triangulated the data in order to determine consistency across the participants' responses by comparing the quantitative and qualitative data

to see the similarities and differences in the data. Second, I chose low inference descriptors in the Likert scale questions so the participants could easily understand the response options and more consistently respond. An example of a low inference descriptor Likert scale question I used in my survey is, “I believe collaboration in my action teams helps to improve my teaching method.” This type of low inference descriptor attempts to make the wording clear by minimizing words with multiple meanings. Third, I answered participant questions to clarify content of the questions or structure of the survey. For instance, two teachers contacted me separately with a concern that their specific action team might not provide enough information about collaboration since they did not all meet together at the same time, but instead worked on specific tasks. I explained that their input was valuable and requested they answer as honestly as they could about their collaboration within their team.

I also used specific strategies in order to strengthen validity within my study. First, I researched multiple surveys on teacher collaboration as I developed the survey. This allowed me to gain knowledge about possible constructs, questions, and wording. Second, the survey was anonymous, which could reduce social desirability and increase accuracy of participants’ responses. After a staff member expressed a concern about anonymity, I reiterated to the entire staff that the survey was anonymous. Finally, I strengthened the internal validity by triangulating Likert scale and open-ended responses during data analysis by comparing the quantitative and qualitative data produced by the responses.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were used to strengthen the trustworthiness of my study. As the researcher, I recognized my prolonged engagement with the full school community; therefore, I worked to reduce possible biases. I kept a reflective journal to help me be cognizant of, and

minimize, my biases. I developed the survey to allow the data to speak for themselves and participants to share their perceptions about collaboration in their action groups. For example, I did not include leading questions in the survey. Additionally, I kept detailed notes on all communication with the participants. The qualitative and quantitative data were triangulated in order to check the consistency of the findings. Finally, I kept a detailed audit trail of all the data and materials collected through each stage of the study.

Data Sources

The main source of data used in this study is a survey (see Appendix G), which allowed for larger scale data collection. I first identified two published surveys on similar topics (see Appendix H). UNCC (n.d.) suggests that K-12 teachers and administrators use their sample survey to identify how participants view collaborative teaching. Moore's (2009) survey was used to compare the level of collaboration across two districts. Both surveys were used to investigate teacher collaboration in schools; however, they did not focus specifically on action teams. Thus, I adapted them to make the questions specific to action teams. I developed the survey to include a demographic section and three sections based on the purpose and research question for this study. The first section focuses on overall perceptions of teacher collaboration in action teams. The second section focuses on the benefits of teacher collaboration in action teams. The third section focuses on the barriers experienced with teacher collaboration in action teams.

There were five selected-response demographic questions at the beginning of the survey. There were five multiple choice questions (i.e., action team, highest degree earned, years participated in action teams, years at the school, and teaching degree). These questions were chosen to better understand the teaching experience and educational background of the participants.

The survey included both quantitative, Likert Scale questions and qualitative open-ended questions. The Likert scale ranged from one to five: one represented *strongly disagree,* two represented *somewhat disagree,* three represented *neither agree or disagree,* four represented *somewhat agree,* and five represented *strongly agree.* The qualitative questions allowed for free response.

The first section focused on teachers' overall perceptions of teacher collaboration in action teams. There were six quantitative, Likert scale questions (e.g., "I believe collaboration in my action team is supported by my school"). There were two qualitative, open-ended questions (e.g., "What other aspects of collaborative action teams do you feel are important?") The focus of the questions was to collect the perceptions of the participants with an opportunity to provide more details. This allowed for triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data.

The second section focused on teachers perceived benefits of teacher collaboration in action teams. There were five quantitative, Likert scale questions (e.g., "I believe collaboration in my action teams helps to benefit me as a teacher"). There were two qualitative, open-ended questions (e.g., "List any comments or opinions you have on the benefits of collaboration within your respective action teams"). The focus of these questions was to find out how the staff viewed the benefits of collaboration and to provide an opportunity to explain their responses in depth. The quantitative and qualitative questions were used for triangulation of the data.

The final section focused on teachers' perceived barriers experienced with teacher collaboration in action teams. There were five quantitative, Likert scale questions (e.g., "I believe collaboration in my action teams hinders me as a teacher.") There were two qualitative, open-ended questions (e.g., "Are there any suggestions you have on how to improve barriers to collaboration in your action team that you have identified?") The questions of this section were

important to identify any barriers that the participants may perceive in their group and offered them the chance to give opinions on suggestions for improvements to the barriers they identify using the qualitative section. These questions allowed me to better understand the data and the participant's voices through triangulation.

Additionally, I collected articles and materials that my principal provided. For example, my principal shared the Jordan (1999) article with me to provide research that supports his decision to have action teams at the school. He also shared the leadership minutes from this summer where they organized the five action teams and pulled the reasons why they felt these teams were necessary for the school. These resources provided background information about the reasoning behind the action teams in our school and the specific responsibilities of each action team.

Data Collection

I emailed the survey to members of each action team through Qualtrics survey service because it offered the greatest option of understanding with layout of questions and data access through an excel document. The quantitative data were collected from the 16 Likert scale questions. The qualitative data were collected from the participants' responses to the six open-ended response questions. The data were exported from Qualtrics after the two-week period had ended. There were not any monetary or professional incentives for the participants to complete the survey. However, the results of the study will be shared with the school in narrative format, which will allow the administrators to use the results to guide future action team decisions.

Data Analysis

In order to answer the research question, several data analysis techniques were employed. First, the demographic data of the participants were analyzed using frequencies. Then,

quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS software with descriptive statistical analysis. Next, the qualitative data were analyzed using a priori coding and open coding. Finally, all of the data were triangulated to better understand the participants' responses and confirm the findings.

Demographic data. The demographic data were analyzed using frequencies to obtain the number of participants and valid percentages for the responses. This enabled me to better understand the participants' experiences and backgrounds by identifying their participation in action teams, years of experience in action teams, years of experience teaching, level of education, degree earned, and teaching certification.

Quantitative data. I analyzed the quantitative, Likert scale responses using descriptive statistical analysis in SPSS. Using this analysis, the range, mean, and standard deviation for each question was identified in order to understand how the participants felt about the constructs (see Table 2). This analysis revealed the range (from one to five) of participants' perceptions of teacher collaboration across action teams. The mean of the responses and the standard deviation between the answers of the group were revealed. I chose to analyze the data for all action teams together, rather than compare the teams, since I am studying overall perceptions in their action teams. Further, this decision allows me to protect the identity of participants.

Table 2

Summary of Descriptive Statistical Analysis of Quantitative Data from Collaboration Survey

Item Text	N Statistic	Range Statistic	Mean Statistic	Mean Std. Error	Std. Deviation Statistic	Variation Statistic
P1. I believe collaboration in my action team is supported by my school.	24	1	4.96	.042	.204	.042
P2. I believe collaboration in my action team is supported by the staff members in the school.	24	1	4.75	.090	.442	.196

P3. I believe collaboration in my action team is contributed to by all the members of our action team.	24	1	4.79	.085	.415	.172
P4. I believe collaboration in my action team is an important aspect of our action team.	24	2	4.83	.098	.482	.232
P5. I believe collaboration in my action team is used to guide our discussion during our action team.	24	2	4.71	.127	.642	.389
P6. I believe collaboration in my action team is used to make decisions as a team.	24	1	4.83	.078	.381	.145
BE1. I believe collaboration in my action teams helps to improve my teaching method.	23	4	3.22	.243	1.166	1.360
BE2. I believe collaboration in my action teams helps to improve my ability to teach subject content.	23	4	2.96	.231	1.107	1.225
BE3. I believe collaboration in my action teams helps to improve my ability to manage students.	23	4	3.57	.225	1.080	1.166
BE4. I believe collaboration in my action teams helps to benefit me as a teacher.	23	3	4.22	.166	.795	.632
BE5. I believe collaboration in my action teams helps to benefits me as a collaborative member or the community here at my school.	23	2	4.39	.163	.783	.613
BA1. I believe collaboration in my action teams hinders me to improve my teaching method.	21	2	1.62	.189	.865	.748
BA2. I believe collaboration in my action teams hinders me to improve my ability to teach subject content.	21	2	1.67	.199	.913	.833
BA3. I believe collaboration in my action teams hinders me to improve my ability to manage students.	21	2	1.57	.177	.811	.657

BA4. I believe collaboration in my action teams hinders me as a teacher.	21	2	1.33	.144	.658	.433
BA5. I believe collaboration in my action teams hinders me to benefit me as a collaborative member or the community here at my school.	21	2	1.33	.144	.658	.433
Valid N	21					

Qualitative data. I examined the qualitative, open-ended responses using a priori coding and open coding. I printed off the open-ended responses and first coded them using the a priori codes of perceptions, benefits, and barriers of teacher collaboration in action teams. Using these a priori codes, I first wrote any codes in the margin that applied to the three a priori codes (e.g., my voice was heard). Then I collapsed the codes by similarities into categories (e.g., all voices heard, respect). Finally, I collapsed the categories into subthemes (e.g., feeling valued) and themes (e.g., perceptions of the importance of action teams). I identified three themes: perceptions on importance of action teams, benefits of collaboration, and barriers to collaboration. Additionally, many subthemes emerged (e.g. feeling valued in the perceptions of the importance of action teams).

Data were also analyzed using open coding in order to capture additional codes from the participants' responses. Through open coding, a fourth theme emerged: suggestions for future collaboration. The themes, subthemes, and categories are represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Themes, Subthemes, and Categories

Themes	Subthemes	Categories
Perceptions of Action Teams	Environment	Safe environment
		Comfortable to share thoughts and ideas
		See/learn different perspectives from various staff
		Same mission and vision for the team's outcomes
		Focus on task at hand
	Feeling Valued	All voices heard
		Everyone's opinion matters
		Respect
		Freedom of expression
		Trust
	Tasks/Products	Tasks evenly distributed
		Work together to come to an agreement
		Making decisions for the school
Benefits of Collaboration	Feelings	Sense of belonging and friendship
		Respect
		Boost each other up
		Motivation
	Outcomes	Best decisions made for school and students
		Benefit to students
		Promotes cooperation at our school
	Collaborative Behaviors	Working together
		Hearing and receiving the ideas and perspectives of others across the school
		Brainstorming/Bounce ideas off of each other
		Splitting workload/Time management
Barriers to Collaboration	Need to feel safe	
	One person takes over	
	No Barriers	
	Not a teacher	
Suggestions for Future Collaboration	Make collaboration key in decision making	
	Divide responsibilities	
	Hearing ideas when brainstorming	
	Overcoming barriers on collaboration	No barriers found with no suggestions

Triangulation. I triangulated the quantitative and qualitative data to fully answer the research question, identify patterns across the data, and best represent the participants' perceptions. Analyzing multiple data sources increased the strength of the themes and subthemes. For instance, using the data from the participants' responses made visible the few barriers participants feel exist in their action teams when compared to the qualitative responses. When participants completed the quantitative barrier section on the survey, most participants selected disagree or strongly disagree about barriers in their action teams. The qualitative data listed three barriers in the action teams: a) need to feel safe to share ideas, b) one person takes over, and c) not being a teacher. This showed that although most (n=19) participants answered "disagree" or "strongly disagree" in the quantitative data, there were some participants who felt some barriers did exist.

Findings

In this section, the four themes that emerged from the data are discussed: a) perceptions on the importance of action teams, b) benefits on collaboration, c) barriers to collaboration, and d) suggestions for future collaboration. Both quantitative and qualitative data are presented in order to represent these themes, as well as highlight the results of my triangulation.

The quantitative data from the Likert scale questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The Likert scale ranged from one to five: one representing *strongly disagree*, two representing *somewhat disagree*, three representing *neither agree or disagree*, four representing *somewhat agree*, and five representing *strongly agree*.

The qualitative data were analyzed using a priori coding and open coding. I include thick description with participant quotes for each theme. Finally, I provide an explanation of how the data were triangulated in order to gather a deeper understanding of the four themes.

Perceptions of Collaboration in Action Teams

The theme of perceptions of collaboration in action teams is essentially how the participants perceive the current collaboration in their action teams. I identified participants' (n=24) perceptions about collaboration in their action teams (see Table 2). Most participants (n=23) strongly agreed collaboration is supported in their school (M=4.96, SD=.204) and collaboration (n=18) is being supported by staff in the school (M=4.75, SD=.442). Belief that collaboration is contributed to by all members of their action team was high in agreement (M=4.79, SD=.415). Approximately 88% of participants also strongly agreed that collaboration is an important part of their action team (M=4.83, SD=.482). Belief that collaboration is used to guide discussion in their action team was agreed upon by most participants (M=4.71, SD=.642). and most of the participants (n=20) agreed in the belief that collaboration is used to make decisions as a team (M=4.83, SD=.381).

The qualitative data supported the previous quantitative data on teacher and staff perceptions of collaboration. Further the participants' responses provided more insight into their perceptions of collaboration, as represented by the three subthemes: environment, feeling valued, and tasks/products.

Environment. The environment subtheme focuses on the environment in which the action team takes place and the feelings within the environment. In the environment subtheme, I discovered one of the participants felt having a safe environment where he or she felt comfortable to share thoughts and ideas was important. The participant shared, "I feel it is important for all members to feel comfortable to share thoughts and ideas with each other without feeling judged." Other perceptions of the environment by the respondents were: a) they felt it was important to be able to focus on the tasks at hand, b) they believed they should have the same mission and vision for their team's outcomes, and c) they valued seeing and learning the perspectives of other staff members. Having the same mission and vision for outcomes aligns with the perception from the quantitative data that collaboration allows them to guide discussions in their action teams.

Feeling valued. In the next subtheme, feeling valued, the focus is on the perceptions of feeling valued while within their action teams. The emerged subtheme of feeling valued presented two participants who felt trust is important. Two participants also said that they felt valued when all voices were heard. One participant wrote, "Everyone has a part and all voices are heard." "Everyone's opinions matter" and "respect" were also important in feeling valued in their action teams. Freedom of expression during their action teams left the participants feeling valued as well.

Tasks/Products. In the final subtheme of perceptions, tasks/products focused on splitting the task evenly within the group members and the outcomes from their action teams. A participant responded, “Everyone should be a part of decisions. Delegation of tasks should be evenly distributed to all team members.” Collaboration being contributed to by all members is a piece of quantitative data with which this aligns. Three participants presented working together to come to an agreement was an influential part of this perception. Making the best decisions for the school was another finding discovered in this subtheme.

After analyzing both quantitative and qualitative survey data, the data were triangulated in order to strengthen validity. I looked at the quantitative and qualitative data on perceptions of collaboration together to identify the similar angles in each set of data. In the quantitative data, I found that participants felt that collaboration is used to guide discussions and to make decisions. This was supported by the qualitative data when they responded that collaboration helped them come to an agreement and work through the issues in the action teams.

Benefits of Collaboration in Action Teams

The second theme of benefits of collaboration in the action teams in order to see the positive outlook of collaboration also emerged. In looking into the benefits of collaboration in the action teams, there were some disagreements in what some participants (n=24) saw as beneficial to their action teams. Some participants (n=10) did not agree or disagree that collaboration in their action teams helped to improve their teaching method (*M*= 3.22, SD=1.166) or collaboration helped improve their ability to teach subject content (n=11) (M=2.96, SD=1.107). Again, this occurred when asked if collaboration in their action teams helped them to manage their students, with eight participants saying neither disagree nor agree (*M*=3.57, *SD*=1.080). The belief that collaboration benefited them as a teacher had 88% of

participants somewhat agree or strongly agree (*M*=4.22, *SD*=.795) which was higher than the previous three questions. When asked if collaboration helped benefit them as a member of the community within the school, it was more highly agreed upon with a higher mean and with 13 strongly agreeing (*M*=4.39, *SD*=.783). This could be due to the fact that some of the staff who participated were not teachers and the other questions pertained more to teachers.

The qualitative data supported the quantitative data on teacher and staff perceptions on the benefits of collaboration in student achievement. The qualitative data did not support the quantitative data with participants not seeing benefits of collaboration in their teaching content and subject areas. Further, the participants' responses provided more insight into their ideas on the benefits of collaboration through three subthemes: feelings, outcomes, and collaborative behaviors.

Feelings. The subtheme of feelings is based on the feelings that participants have on the benefits of collaboration. The feelings on the benefits of collaboration included respect, motivation, and boosting each other up. One participant said, "I feel it is extremely important because we as a school need to boost each other up. Teaching can be so stressful and I feel that our action team really takes time to make teachers feel important and recognizes them for the good things they do." Four participants said a sense of belonging and friendship were other benefits of collaboration.

Outcomes. This particular subtheme focuses on how collaboration in the action team benefits the participants to complete their work. The subtheme showed three participants felt it is important to have collaboration in order to make the best decisions for the school and the students. One participant felt, "The best decisions can be made for the welfare of our students

and community." Participants also felt collaboration benefits the outcome of student achievement and promotes cooperation within their school.

Collaborative behavior. In this subtheme, participants identified the collaborative behavior benefits that come from collaboration. The final subtheme is collaborative behavior as the benefit of collaboration. This has shown an outstanding agreement on hearing and receiving the ideas and perspectives of others across the school as a benefit to collaboration of their action teams, with eight participants finding this as a benefit. A participant stated, "It's important to get the perspective of different team members when making decisions for the school." In the quantitative data, many participants said a benefit of collaboration was feeling like a member of the community. This qualitative finding aligns with the quantitative data. Some other collaborative behaviors on the benefits identified by the participants on collaboration were working together, brainstorming/bouncing ideas off each other, and splitting the workload/time management.

After analyzing both types of data on the benefits of collaboration, I was able to triangulate the data in order to strengthen validity. I was able to look at the quantitative and qualitative data to identify the differences presented by the two types of data.

Barriers on Collaboration in Action Teams

The third theme that emerged was on barriers to collaboration in action teams to see the possible issues that may exist in the action teams. The barriers section of the survey provided a positive outcome on the barriers of collaboration in the action teams. Many seemed to answer 1 (*strongly disagree)* or 2 *(somewhat disagree)* in this section. I analyzed the beliefs that collaboration hinders them as teachers/staff of the school. Some participants (n=13) strongly disagreed that barriers hindered their ability to improve their teaching method (*M*=1.62,

SD=.865). The same correlation occurred with the hinderance of ability to teach subject content with 13 participants strongly disagreeing (*M*=1.67, *SD*=.913). 13 participants strongly disagreed collaboration hindered the ability to manage students (*M*=1.57, *SD*=.811). Collaboration as a hinderance to being a teacher had the same mean and standard deviation as collaboration hindering them as a collaborative member in the school community (*M*=1.33, *SD*=.658) with 16 strongly disagreeing. The low scores on this section are due to the fact that many of the participants did not find collaboration in their action teams as a barrier to them or the school.

In the analysis, the qualitative data supported the quantitative data on staff perceptions related to the barriers of collaboration within their action teams. Further, the participants' responses provided more understanding of their barriers in the action team by the three subthemes: a) feel safe to share ideas, b) one person taking over, and c) not being a teacher.

Need to feel safe to share ideas. The need to feel safe in order to share ideas was one subtheme found in the qualitative data that showed the barrier that they found on collaboration in their action team. This barrier was only mentioned by one participant. They stated that, "You need to feel safe to share ideas." This shows that collaboration can be a barrier if one does not feel safe to share ideas.

One person takes over. This subtheme focuses on showing the barrier that a participant may feel during collaboration within their action team. On a qualitative barrier question, one participant noted, "when [one] person takes over and everyone else does not contribute". This showed the participant felt that collaboration can be a barrier in their action team when one participant takes over the conversation and the other members do not get to contribute to the discussion.

No barriers. This subtheme focuses on the participants' beliefs of barriers in the action team. Four participants responded that they found no barriers on collaboration in their action teams.

Not a teacher. In this subtheme, a participant focused on the barrier they felt on collaboration that existed with them not being a teacher. Not being a teacher was a barrier on some of the collaboration in the action team. "I am not a classroom teacher; therefore, this is not really applicable to me." It seemed this participant felt that since they were not a teacher, some of the collaboration dealing with classrooms did not pertain to them based on a participant's response.

When I analyzed both types of data for the barriers, I was able to triangulate the data in order to strengthen validity. The quantitative and qualitative data on the barriers were analyzed to identify the similar angles between each set of data. The quantitative data presented that participants did not see many barriers to collaboration in their action teams. There were four participants that agreed there were no barriers to be found in the collaboration in their action teams in the qualitative section. This signals that both sets of data found few barriers.

Suggestions for Future Collaboration

In the final theme, "suggestions for future collaboration in action teams", participants offered opinions on items to change in the future for the school. This theme emerged during the open coding (see Table 3). This theme was only found within the qualitative data but does align with some quantitative data as shown in the following subthemes.

Make collaboration key in decision making. This subtheme is based on a suggestion of how to improve the barriers found in their action team. One participant felt collaboration was key to making decisions. The participant said, "…collaboration should be key to make sure we are

making the best decisions for both the school and local community." This aligns with the quantitative question where 20 participants agreed that collaboration is used in order to make decisions as a team.

Divide responsibilities. This subtheme was focused off of a suggestion a participant matter about collaboration in their action team. The participant said, "It is easier to take care of our issues if we divide responsibilities." According to this participant, it is important to keep in mind they should divide the responsibilities. This data aligns with the quantitative finding that participants (n=24) strongly agreed and somewhat agreed that collaboration is used to make decisions. Dividing the responsibilities, and collaborating through them, can help them solve the issues.

Hearing ideas when brainstorming. The subtheme of hearing ideas when brainstorming is another important suggestion that many participants made. One participant responded, "…brainstorming and researching together to come up with new ideas." Another participant said, "We are able to bounce ideas off of each other to provide the best opportunities for students." This demonstrated that participants felt these were important things to remember in action teams to benefit collaboration where there are barriers. This aligns with the quantitative data where 24 participants somewhat or strongly agreed that collaboration is contributed to by all members of their action team. This collaboration allows for them to hear the ideas of others when everyone contributes.

Overcoming barriers on collaboration. During the open coding a subtheme appeared called "overcoming barriers on collaboration". When participants were asked about overcoming barriers on collaboration, there were four participants who said there were no suggestions they

could give. This suggested the barriers they identified in their action teams exist, but they have no suggestions on how to solve these.

Discussion

In light of these findings, there are several points on the qualitative and quantitative data that I feel are important for discussion. The triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data allowed me to interpret the themes to deepen my understanding of the data.

Environment, feeling valued, and tasks/products plays a big part in the perceptions people notice about their action teams based on the open-ended responses. “If teams set shared goals and all team members feel like their contributions are valued, it is only natural that members will feel a sense of accountability in completing any tasks assigned, reaching the goal and will be motivated to do so” (Jao & Mcdougall, 2016). This quote supports the subthemes found in the perceptions of collaboration. When participants have an environment in which they feel valued, it will allow the motivation of completion of tasks. When I examined the quantitative data in association with this, 21 out of 24 respondents felt collaboration was an important part of their action team. This finding aligned with Gable’s (2004) research findings which presented collaboration was important to staff relationships. This showed collaboration opens an environment up for the participants in their action team that leaves them feeling valued. Twenty out of 24 participants said it allowed them to use it to come to a decision in order to complete their tasks. Dagostino (2013) found that creating professional collaborative relationships and maintaining them, helps create a positive environment. Perceptions showed positive connection with how people felt within and about their action teams in order to show participants and administrators what they are doing sufficiently with collaboration. Working together to come to an agreement was another finding in the perceptions of collaboration in the action teams in both sets of data when dealing with the tasks/products. The findings of this study align with Newell & Bain’s (2019) research which showed working together toward a common goal is an important point to working as team found commonly in literature. “All participants identified four elements

to understanding course team collaboration from the literature. They were: working together; toward a common goal; working willingly or voluntarily; and sharing or coming to a shared understanding of the problem domain" (Newell & Bain, 2019, p. 7). This finding supports the collaboration in the action teams by presenting to the participants and administrators that working together can lead to positive outputs on task and products by the teams.

Perspectives of others were important in the benefits of collaboration during the open-ended responses. Feelings, outcomes, and collaborative behavior are the important subthemes found in the benefits. This was supported by the quantitative and qualitative data on the benefits of collaboration. When asked if they believed collaboration helped benefit them as a collaborative member of the community here at school, 20 out of 24 participants agreed that it did. During the analysis, benefits to students became one of the findings that stood out in both sets of data. "Of course, the ultimate benefit of teacher collaboration is that it can improve student achievement" (Jao & Mcdougall, 2016, p. 561). Along with this study, Jao & McDougall (2016) found the importance of collaboration on student achievement also in their research. This was resounding in the qualitative responses, where in the quantitative data this was not as agreed upon. Since many participants struggled with seeing the benefit from collaboration in their action teams to their teaching content and subject areas, increasing discussion during action teams on these items may allow teachers to bring those experiences back into the classroom.

Perceptions on the barriers to collaboration were revealed as a) feeling safe, b) one person taking over, c) not a teacher, and d) no barriers found in the qualitative responses. Four respondents agreed there were no barriers to collaboration in their action teams based on participant data. When asked the hinderance of collaboration during their action teams, most participants said strongly disagree or disagree in the quantitative data. This conveyed many

people believed collaboration was not a barrier they found in their action teams. Suggestions were provided for future collaboration to improve the barriers they identified in the action teams: a) collaboration being key in decision making, b) dividing responsibilities, c) brainstorming to hear ideas of others, and d) no suggestions on how to improve the barriers. Constantinou and Ainscow's (2019) research discusses using collaboration as a key component in alterations in schools. The data on the suggestions aligns with this research on collaboration being a key component in making changes and decisions. These findings suggest the few barriers that exist and how to overcome them in the action teams. Administration and participants can take this data into their future meetings in order to be aware of the barriers and, ways to work to overcome them, while in their meetings.

Some of the participants said not being a teacher made the qualitative questions not apply to them. This also may have affected the quantitative responses. Some of the questions asked the participant to give information on barriers and benefits within their classroom or with teaching the content. These questions would have been answered differently by these participants. Considering the research conducted by Porter (1987), collaboration can happen between many different individuals in the school. Porter's (1987) findings suggest that collaboration can apply to the participants who are not a teacher in a different setting. Allowing staff to collaborate on how their content connects to others, even if they are not a teacher, may increase the staff's connectedness to the content.

There was some literature in my research that did not align with my findings in my study. The research conducted by Briscoe and Peter (1997) and Goddard and colleagues' (2007) stated that collaboration did not happen often unless it was within their own grade level or there was little opportunity for it. I did not identify any findings to support this research. Since I did not

offer a question that pertained to this, the explanation for this could be that I did not allow for it to come forth. There is also the possibility that action teams are integrating more staff members that are outside of their grade levels the opportunity to collaborate in their action teams. Vincente's (2017) claim that collaboration helped lead to new instructional strategies did not align with the data provided in the quantitative section for benefits. In fact, most of the respondents claimed the opposite. All the action teams are not always focused on content and subject matter of the school, so this could explain the data not supporting the claims made by Vincente (2017). This could be an idea for implementation in the future for the school.

Implications

There are several important implications of this research for administrators and participants in the action teams. In future action team meetings, administration and participants may want to apply the information given from this study. The first implication showed support is needed to reduce the few barriers that were found, along with the suggestions made by participants to improve them. The next implication is to note the positive perceptions on collaboration in the action teams to see what is going well. The final implication would be constructing the action teams to reach the maximum benefits for the participants and staff.

The first implication is to reduce the few barriers that do exist. The data showed support is needed to reduce the few barriers that were found, and the suggestions made to improve them. Administrators and participants should make sure the responsibilities or tasks of the groups are split between the team members, the workload is not on one person, or one person is taking over. Gable, Mostert, and Tonelson's (2004) research exhibited collaboration is important to building professional relationships. This research supports the point that collaboration should be had by all, rather than one person contributing. They must ensure collaboration is key in the decisions being made in the action teams by hearing each other out when brainstorming. Participants want to feel safe when sharing ideas, so we must create the environment that it is okay for them to freely share. Administration must also find a way to make sure staff that are not teachers can take collaboration from the action teams and apply it to help in their work. As Briscoe and Peters (1997) found, a reward of collaboration can be improvement in their practices.

The second implication administrators and staff members should also see is the positive impacts of collaboration. The strong evidence in the perceptions and barriers section of the data shows many things they are doing sufficiently in those areas that should continue. The perceptions of the school and staff members supporting collaboration in action teams' ties into

the literature of Jordan (1999), where she identifies the support of administration can greatly influence the action team meetings. Lockton (2019) agreed that school leaders had an influence on the type of interaction that occurred in the meetings. Contribution by teammates, using collaboration to guide discussions and make decisions, and the belief that collaboration is an important aspect of the action teams are all positive measures in the action teams.

The third implication is that benefits seem to be an area in where participants were not able to feel that collaboration in their action teams was helping in their teaching method or in their subject content. An implication for an administrator would be to see how they can construct the action teams in order to make sure they are reaching these areas. These data aligned with Ronfeldt, Farmer, Mcqueen, and Grissom's (2015) finding that if the staff members are better collaborators, it will produce a stronger collaborative environment. An implication for staff is if teachers can become stronger collaborators with their peers, then there is a possibility this can transfer into their classroom environments.

Future Research

Looking forward, there are many concepts that could be addressed in future studies. In the survey, I chose not to include interviews with the qualitative data to keep the survey anonymous and to allow more truthful outcomes. This could be an idea included in future research to allow the participants to explain their answers and give a deeper understanding of their responses. I did not include socioeconomic or gender data in the demographic information. This data could possibly allow the researcher to see if there were any difference in the perceptions between the different genders or possibly from teachers who are from different backgrounds.

I chose not to identify data from administrators compared to their staff. This could possibly show the difference in how administrators feel about collaboration in their action teams compared to other staff and teachers. In my research, I decided to not analyze within each action team and compare across action teams. This could possibly be another research method in the future to compare each action team's perceptions on collaboration within their specific action team. Future research could be conducted in the same county but looking at multiple schools. This possibly could allow them to see how collaboration in their action teams may differ in other schools. In this study, I decided not to investigate how collaboration in the school impacted student achievement. Thus, future research could be conducted across schools with varying levels of collaboration to identify potential impacts on student achievement.

Conclusion

The purpose of this mixed method study was to investigate the question: How do elementary teachers and staff describe their collaboration within their respective action groups? I emailed a survey to staff members at Stephens Elementary School. The survey consisted of quantitative Likert scale questions and qualitative open-ended response questions. The quantitative data provided by the participants was analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistical analysis. The qualitative data was analyzed using a priori coding and open coding. The data were triangulated in order to deepen my understanding of the participants' perceptions of collaboration in action teams.

Findings from the survey exhibit perceptions of the collaboration in the action team were highly regarded as the environment, feeling valued, and outcomes were being done sufficiently. Benefits on the collaboration in the action teams had the subthemes of feelings, outcomes, and collaborative behaviors. Collaboration in the action teams seemed to benefit the participants as a teacher and as a part of the school community, but not in teaching subject content or teaching method. Based on the analysis of the data, findings from the survey were that few barriers existed. The few barriers were one person taking over, feeling safe, and not being a teacher. Suggestions were given on how to improve the barriers by making collaboration key in decision making, dividing responsibilities, and hearing ideas of others while brainstorming.

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Appendix A

Principal Consent Letter

ECU COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Department of Elementary Education
and Middles Grades Education
731 Speight Building | Mail Stop 504 | East Carolina University | Greenville, NC 27858-4353
252-328-6833 office | 252-328-2585 fax | www.coe.ecu.edu

Charles Draper
Hiddenite Elementary
374 Sulphur Springs Rd.
Hiddenite, NC 28636

12/10/19

Dear Charles Draper,

Heather Ingram is working on her Master of Arts in Elementary Education at East Carolina University. She just completed ELEM 7000 Thesis, a required course where students plan a thesis proposal to be completed and presented in another course later in their program. As part of a course assignment, Heather Ingram has developed a thesis research project to be conducted over a 4-8 week period at Hiddenite Elementary. This project must be submitted and approved by ECU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) before it can be implemented. Heather Ingram is required to obtain your permission to conduct the project at Hiddenite Elementary. She is required to provide the IRB with a copy of your permission before the IRB will review and/or approve the project.

Please review the attached thesis research project and sign the bottom of this form. The thesis research project is titled, Teacher and Staff Collaboration Through Respective Action Teams in an Elementary School Setting.

Sincerely,

Heather Ingram

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Kristen Gregory
Assistant Professor
Department of Elementary and Middle Grades Education,
College of Education
gregorykr18@ecu.edu

Faculty Supervisor Signature and Date:

Signature 12-13-19 Date

Principal's Signature and Date:

I have received and reviewed a copy of Heather Ingram's proposed action research project and give permission for her to conduct this thesis research project at Hiddenite Elementary.

Signature 12/16/19 Date

Appendix B

IRB Approval Letter

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Heather Ingram
CC: Kristen Gregory
Date: 1/14/2020
Re: UMCIRB 19-002550
Teacher and Staff Collaboration Through Action Teams

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 1/14/2020. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 2ab.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Consent Form(0.02)	Consent Forms
Copy of Thesis (0.01)	Additional Items
Participant Consent Form Thesis (1).docx(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Thesis Proposal(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Thesis Survey (0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(2)(ii) has been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

Appendix C

District Approval

Alexander County Schools

Heather Ingram <hingram@alexander.k12.nc.us>

Fw: IRB: Study Correspondence Letter

3 messages

Ingram, Heather Nicole <ingramh19@students.ecu.edu> Sun, Jan 19, 2020 at 3:53 PM
To: "hingram@alexander.k12.nc.us" <hingram@alexander.k12.nc.us>

From: umcirb@ecu.edu <umcirb@ecu.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, January 14, 2020 09:30 AM
To: Ingram, Heather Nicole <ingramh19@students.ecu.edu>
Subject: IRB: Study Correspondence Letter

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** · **rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/**

Notification of Exempt Certification

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Document	Description
Consent Form(0.02)	Consent Forms
Copy of Thesis (0.01)	Additional Items
Participant Consent Form Thesis (1).docx(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts

Document	Description
Thesis Proposal(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Thesis Survey (0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(2)(ii) has been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418
IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

Study.PI Name:
Study.Co-Investigators:

Heather Ingram <hingram@alexander.k12.nc.us> Sun, Jan 19, 2020 at 4:01 PM
To: Betsy Curry <ecurry@alexander.k12.nc.us>

Good afternoon!

I hope you are enjoying this long weekend! I just wanted to update you on the status of my Thesis study. It was approved by the IRB this week! I will be ready to begin my study soon!

I am forwarding you the letter for my Thesis approval from the ECU IRB. I also attached the principal consent letter for you that Mr. Draper signed for approval. I am also attaching my recent revised Thesis proposal that was submitted to the IRB and my committee for you to look over at your convenienoe for approval.

Thank you,

Heather Ingram
[Quoted text hidden]
--
Heather Ingram
4th Grade Teacher
Hiddenite Elementary
Alexander County Schools

"Education is the most powerful weapon, which you can use to change the world." - Nelson Mandela

2 attachments

hesfax@alexander.k12.nc.us_20191217_173141.pdf
273K

Ingram Revised Thesis Proposal 12-2-19.docx
1276K

Betsy Curry <ecurry@alexander.k12.nc.us> Tue, Jan 21, 2020 at 2:16 PM
To: Heather Ingram <hingram@alexander.k12.nc.us>

Thank you, Heather. Please proceed!
Betsy

Elizabeth M. Curry, Ed. D.
Associate Superintendent
Alexander County Schools

Appendix D

Speech Given at Staff Meeting

Hey Everybody!

I know that it has been a long day for you, so I will try to keep this as short as possible! I am sure many of you have heard that I am working on completing my masters in elementary education. My focus is in teacher leadership for my degree. I am currently working on completing a thesis dealing with staff and teacher collaboration. Since we use collaboration multiple times in our day, I decided to narrow it down to a specific time that we can all relate on. I will be focusing my study on the staff and teacher collaboration within our respective action teams. My goal is to find out your perspective on collaboration during our action teams. I will be sending out an online survey through an email after this staff meeting ends. There will be questions for you on how you feel about collaboration and its possible barriers or benefits. You have up to two weeks to complete this survey. Answer honestly about how you feel about the collaboration in your action team. I will use this data in order to complete my thesis and provide Mr. Draper with any suggestions on changes we can make to better our action teams. Thank you for your time today!

Appendix E

Participant Consent Form

Dear Participant,

I am a master's student at East Carolina University in the College of Education. I am inviting you to take part in my research study entitled, "Teacher and Staff Collaboration Within Their Respective Action Teams in an Elementary Setting".

The purpose of this research is to be used for publication for my thesis, professional development, and as a resource for collaboration in our school. By doing this research, I hope to learn how do elementary teachers and staff describe their collaboration within their respective action teams. Your participation is completely voluntary.

You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a teacher, administration, or staff member in our elementary school who is involved in one of our five respective action teams. The amount of time it will take you to complete this survey is 10 - 20 minutes.

If you agree to take part in this survey, you will be asked question that relate to your action teams. These questions will include opinion questions that are open-ended questions, questions on barriers and ways that the action teams are helpful using the Likert scale, and demographic questions.

This research is overseen by the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at ECU. Therefore, some of the UMCIRB members or the UMCIRB staff may need to review your research data. However, the information you provide will not be linked to you. Therefore, your responses cannot be traced back to you by anyone, including me.

If you have questions about your rights when taking part in this research, call the University and Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, call the Director of Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

You do not have to take part in this research, and you can stop at any time. If you decide you are willing to take part in this study, continue with the survey below.

Thank you for considering participation in my research.

Sincerely,

Heather Ingram

ingramh19@students.ecu.edu

828-638-5320

Principal Investigator

Appendix F

CITI Certifications

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS*

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Heather Ingram (ID: 8178423)
- **Institution Affiliation:** East Carolina University (ID: 316)
- **Institution Email:** ingramh19@students.ecu.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Elementary Education
- **Phone:** NA

- **Curriculum Group:** Human Research
- **Course Learner Group:** Group 2.Social / Behavorial Research Investigators and Key Personnel
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 31980525
- **Completion Date:** 10-Jun-2019
- **Expiration Date:** 09-Jun-2022
- **Minimum Passing:** 70
- **Reported Score*:** 97

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	10-Jun-2019	3/3 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
International Research - SBE (ID: 509)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees (ID: 483)	10-Jun-2019	2/4 (50%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k0bcee68b-7b88-4ebc-a001-99787434a10f-31980525

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)

COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** NOTE: Scores on this Transcript Report reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. See list below for details. See separate Requirements Report for the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Heather Ingram (ID: 8178423)
- **Institution Affiliation:** East Carolina University (ID: 316)
- **Institution Email:** ingramh19@students.ecu.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Elementary Education
- **Phone:** NA

- **Curriculum Group:** Human Research
- **Course Learner Group:** Group 2.Social / Behavorial Research Investigators and Key Personnel
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 31980525
- **Report Date:** 28-Sep-2019
- **Current Score**:** 100

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	10-Jun-2019	3/3 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Research with Prisoners - SBE (ID: 506)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
International Research - SBE (ID: 509)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	10-Jun-2019	5/5 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees (ID: 483)	10-Jun-2019	4/4 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k0bcee68b-7b88-4ebc-a001-99787434a10f-31980525

Appendix G

Survey

Demographic Questions:

Directions: Select your answers from the choice below

1. What is your respective action team?
2. How many years have you been a part of action teams?
3. How many years have you been teaching at this current school?
4. What is the highest type of degree you have?
5. What type of teaching certification do you have?

Opinion of the Teacher and Staff Collaboration Within their Respective Action Teams

Directions: Choose between 1-5 (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neither agree nor disagree, 4: agree, and 5: strongly agree).

I believe collaboration in action teams is:

1. Supported by my school.
2. Supported by the staff members in the school.
3. Contributed to by all the members of our action team.
4. An important aspect of our action team.
5. Used to guide our discussion during our action team.
6. Used to make decisions as a team.

Directions: Please type your answers for each question below.

1. What other aspects of collaborative action teams do you feel are important?
2. What do you feel is the most important benefit of collaboration within your respective action team?

Opinion of the Benefits of Teacher Collaboration in their Respective Action Teams

Directions: Choose between 1-5 (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neither agree nor disagree, 4: agree, and 5: strongly agree).

I believe collaboration in my action teams helps to:

1. Improve my teaching method.
2. Improve my ability to teach subject content.
3. Improve my ability to manage students.
4. Benefit me as a teacher.
5. Benefit me as a collaborative member of the community here at my school.

Directions: Please type your answers for each question below.

1. Please list any comments or opinions that you have of the benefits of collaboration within your respective action teams.
2. Are there any suggestions you have on the benefits on collaboration in your action team that you have identified?

Opinion on the Barriers of Teacher Collaboration in their Respective Action Teams

Directions: Choose between 1-5 (1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neither agree nor disagree, 4: agree, and 5: strongly agree).

I believe collaboration in my action teams hinders me:

1. To improve my teaching method.
2. To improve my ability to teach subject content.
3. To improve my ability to manage students.
4. As a teacher.
5. To benefit me as a collaborative member of the community here at my school.

Directions: Please type your answers for each question below.

1. Please list any comments or opinions that you have on the barriers on collaboration within your respective action team.
2. Are there any suggestions you have on how to improve any barriers on collaboration in your action team that you have identified?

Appendix H

Example Surveys

This first survey I received from the UNCC system (UNCC, n.d.) as an example that they have posted on their website for students to use. I adapted this information when developing benefits of collaboration questions in my survey.

1) How often do you work with other teachers on curriculum planning?

- ○ Very Often
- ○ Often
- ○ Occasionally
- ○ Never

2) How often do you work with other teachers on extracurricular activity planning?

- ○ Very Often
- ○ Often
- ○ Occasionally
- ○ Never

3) How often do you combine classes with other teachers for shared teaching activities?

- ○ Very Often
- ○ Often
- ○ Occasionally
- ○ Never

4) Does your school have a mentor program for teachers who are new to the discipline?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

5) What type of assistance does your school offer to beginning teachers? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Textbook Selection
- ☐ Curriculum Planning
- ☐ Activity Planning
- ☐ Classroom Discipline Advice
- ☐ Budgetary Planning Advice
- ☐ Home/School Communication
- ☐ Other:

6) How much does your school support collaborative teaching?

- Great Deal
- Somewhat
- Unsure
- Little
- Very Little

7) What do you feel is the most important benefit of collaborative teaching?

Select one...

8) What other aspects of collaborative teaching do you feel are important?

9) How long have you been teaching?

Select one...

10) What geographical area is the school you teach in located?

- Suburban
- City
- Rural

11) What type of school do you teach in?

- Public
- Private:Secular
- Private:Non-Secular

12) What grade level do you teach?

Select one...

13) What can your school do to promote collaborative teaching?

This survey is one that I pulled from a research article by Moore (2009). I adapted questions from this survey to create my demographic questions, Likert scale questions on the benefits and barriers of teacher collaboration.

Survey Questions:

Teacher Demographics

1. What school are you currently teaching at?
2. How many years have you taught school full time?
3. How many years have you been teaching at this school?
4. Have you worked in another profession?
5. What type of teaching certification do you have?
6. What is the highest college degree you have earned?
7. Is your degree directly related to your teaching career?
8. What subjects do you teach?
9. Are you currently participating in a teacher collaboration program?

Collaborative Structure (survey branching for non-collaborative teachers)

10. How many teacher participate in your collaborative group?
11. How are the group members selected?
12. Who leads the group?
13. How often does your group meet?
14. When does your group meet?

15. What are the main purposes or goals of your group?

16. Are Attendance and Participation in your group mandatory?

17. How strongly do you support collaboration?

Likert Scale Opinion of the Benefits of Teacher Collaboration

I believe teacher collaboration helps to:

18. Improve my teaching methods.

19. Improve my ability to teach subject content.

20. Improve my ability to manage students.

21. Benefit me as a teacher.

Likert Scale Indicators of Potential Attrition

22. I intend to make teaching my lifetime career.

23. I believe teacher salaries are appropriate for the profession.

24. As a teacher I feel strongly supported by my administration.

25. I am excited and enthusiastic about my teaching career.

26. Please list any other comments or opinions you have regarding teacher collaboration.