



Beneath the unfinished Pyramid

Working Collaboratively to Build a
Learning Community

Lorraine C. Caputo
Sussex Central High School
TNLI - Delaware

Research Questions

How effective are collaborative teaching models we use for student success? How can we build a more effective collaborative learning community ?

Context and Rationale for Study

By asking for the impossible, obtain the best possible
Italian proverb

Like the *Great Seal of America*, this study has two sides, both equally important and relevant to the inquiry of school community collaboration that effect student success. One side presents how our current *inclusion model* TAM (team approach to mastery) operates to provide the least restrictive environment (LRE) to students with disabilities. The other side is an action to build collaboration in our school community so any co-teaching model would be successful. They are both the same process using the same renewable resource. The process is collaboration; the resource learning.

I have been teaching students with special learning needs for ten years, eight of those at my current school, Sussex Central High School in

Georgetown, Delaware. We are one of two high schools in the Indian River School District in Sussex County, Delaware. SCHS has a little over eleven hundred students with approximately twelve percent being classified as students with special needs, however we have a larger population of at-risk students. We currently have a staff of eighty-three, ten of which are special education teachers, and eight of which TAM teach core subject areas. This school year was a milestone for us. We moved into a new (not entirely complete) building and changed from block scheduling to a rotating seven period days. But, we still remain an evolving profession of learners.

Although I received training about inclusion and least restrictive environment models in undergraduate and master classes of education, I was not prepared eight years ago when I entered my first co-teaching TAM class as a special education teacher. There was no guide to follow from the school, only my own research of how to collaborate with other teachers and what model to use. I was fortunate to work in one class with a veteran, organized teacher who welcomed me as an equal partner to help all students learn. We met after school bi-weekly to review lesson plans, strategies and interventions. The next year I worked with a different teacher in a different core subject. And so the story continued until four years ago

when we finally began to keep the same teachers in the same core area. This enabled a consistent working relationship to be constructed with the teachers and an opportunity for the special education teacher to become familiar with core subject material.

When students first walk into a classroom and see two teachers they always ask why and who is *really* in charge, but that belief is part of a culture that needs to be changed. The purpose of this action/research is to reflect the work we are doing and what we need to do to change our existing culture; to build a professional and collaborated learning community that is sustainable and beneficial to all students.

Literature Review

*I not only use all of the brains I
have, but all I can borrow."*
Woodrow Wilson

No changes have been made in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) mandate of the Federal Individual Disability Education Act of 1975. However, on July 1, 2005, the reauthorized IDEA, signed by President Bush in December 2004, will take effect. The *Special Ed Advocate* states:

Schools will be required to provide "high-quality, intensive pre-service preparation and professional development for all personnel who work with children with disabilities" so all school staff have "skills and knowledge to improve the academic achievement and functional performance of children with disabilities" . . . "including the use of **scientifically based instructional practices.**" (Wrights, 2005, p. 1)

Troen and Boles (2005) state that the culture of schools is based on an "egg-crate" model 150 years past its prime (p. 1). Schools are not organizations where teachers can view themselves as part of an "assembly line", working in their own space "to produce the best product at the best

price" (p. 1). We need to work together, taking time to evaluate curriculum, write common assessments and work on intervention plans. The catalytic process of collaboration needs to incorporate the unique knowledge, skills, and attitude of the entire school community. That cooperation relies on "group members who are intent on reaching the **same** goals, who need specific information from each group member, or who receive the same rewards or consequences for the group's action". (Idol et al, 1994, p. 6).

When we develop into a **Professional Learning Community** we will continuously share learning and then take steps to improve student achievement based on what we discover. This process is collaboration and the model relies on "parity and equity of contribution from all collaborators" (Idol et al, 1994, p. 13). The acquisition of contributions depends on us as professionals to continually "acquire expertise in the following three areas:

- An underlying knowledge base
- Interpersonal communicative, interactive, problem solving skills
- Intrapersonal attitudes". (Idol, et al, 1994, p. 14).

According to DuFour (2004) three **Big Ideas** must be part of any collaborative learning community:

1. Ensure that students learn
2. Have a culture of collaboration
3. Focus on results" (p. 6)

DuFour goes on to discuss how barriers that exist must be removed.

"School and district leaders cannot merely present teachers with state standards or district curriculum guides and assume collaboration will take place. This will **not** guarantee that all students have access to common curriculum or that teachers are developing a culture of collaboration"

(DuFour, 2004, p. 7). The collaboration we organize has to be evaluated and we have to scrutinize the findings. This includes our curriculum and how we assess it and how the state (Department of Education) judges whether learning was achieved. We have to devote a regular daily amount of time for our **Professional Learning Community** to be successful.

Harry Wong (2003) asserts that a model needs to be in place to structure effective teaching for new teachers. However, the model is needed for all teachers in the community. Teachers need to network, support each other and make a commitment to take on leadership roles in a

collaborating school (p. 2). John Dewey (1933) explains "that the members within an [educational] society cannot exist without outlets to communicate ideas, opinions, expectations and standards (p. 3) . It therefore becomes necessary to structure schools not only with ample class time, but ample collaborative teacher time. To meet the goal of being a professional learning community we must re-culture schools communities not get on the merry-go-round of fads or quick fixes. (Christy, 2004)

"Schools reflect the inherent characteristic of community" (Christy, 2004). Our community exists and grows because we develop common values and ways of working together (Garmston et al, 1999). If we reorganize our structure to allow expanded professional roles, networking and cooperation, it has been found that teachers will increase their own sense of efficacy and sustain behaviors that need to stay in our profession (Hord, 1997).

TOOLS

There is no more powerful tool than *knowledge*.
Dave Heineman

Interviews

All TAM teachers, both special education and regular education teachers were given seven questions about their classroom collaborative

teaching model. Questions included how they define teacher roles, responsibilities and student success. They were also asked if they had common planning time and how much time they spent collaborating.

End of the year summaries were written by Physical Science general education teachers.

Team members of the Learning Focused Team (LFS) were interviewed with questions relating to how collaborative methods have altered their classrooms and filtered within their departments.

Failure Analysis Report (Physical Science)

Special education student success rate in the TAM Physical Science classes was calculated from end of year totals.

Meetings

Weekly meetings evolved for Physical Science TAM teachers to discuss curriculum and student learning.

Bi-monthly meetings were established for the Learning Focused Team to prepare faculty presentation of exemplary teaching practice and develop a Professional Learning Community.

Neighborhood Visits

A checklist of strategies was written and the LFS team spent one day in March, 2005 visiting all classrooms in our school for 5-7 minutes to "count" strategies used in teaching. Teachers were told about visit, but did not know the day.

Exit Surveys

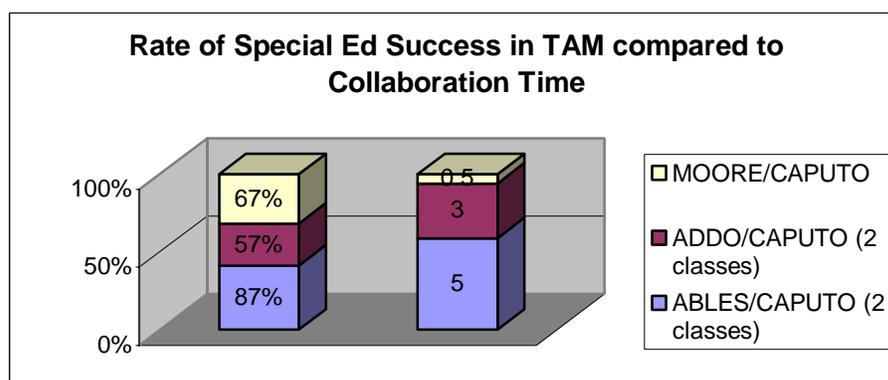
The LFS team wrote Ticket Out surveys after each faculty collaborated presentation to assess understanding and obtain suggestions for future development.

Videos

Two of four workshop presentations were videoed to be used by the LFS team for reflective evaluation.

Physical Science TAM Data

TAM CLASS TEACHERS	PERCENT OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT COURSE SUCCESS	AMOUNT OF COLLABORATION TIME WEEKLY	NUMBER OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS
ABLES/CAPUTO (2 classes)	87%	5	16
ADDO/CAPUTO (2 classes)	57%	3	14
MOORE/CAPUTO	67%	0.5	6



There is a direct relationship between the rate of success in TAM class of Ables/Caputo and amount of collaboration time.

TAM Teacher End of Year Evaluations

All three TAM Physical Science teachers were asked to summarize our collaborative efforts, the joys and the pitfalls.

- TAM class was a new experience for Moore. Since she began teaching she only has taught chemistry and AP chemistry. She expressed that she became more aware of working as a team player

and she is "sure that the students benefited from learning from two different teachers with different styles of teaching".

- Addo was also new to the TAM world. Only a second year teacher she commended tasks such as
 - Uniformed agenda
 - Same high standards for student achievement
 - Working with an extremely motivated teacher
 - Willingness to provide additional support
 - Cohesiveness in lecture/lab activities
 - Advance preparation for class

Addo's needs improvement list was shorter, but succinct in stating that more time is needed to discuss differences in teaching strategies.

- Ables had also not been part of a special education TAM class however, she had co-taught with an ESL teacher. She echoed Addo's and Moore's commendation that students benefit because of the division of labor in the classroom. There are more opportunities to individualize instruction and use intervention strategies for struggling students.

Overview of Special Education Collaboration				
Interview Results from TAM Teachers				
	English TAM 9th grade TAM 10th grade	Math TAM 9th grade TAM 10th grade	Science TAM 9th grade TAM 10th grade	Social Studies TAM 9th grade TAM 10th grade
Percent of Special Ed Students	50%	50%	35%	35%
Type of Collaborative Model	Lead and Support	Lead and Support	Team Teaching	Lead and Support
Individual Education Plans reviewed	Only by special ed	Only by special ed	Only by special ed	Only by special ed
Common Planning Time	No	No	1 class only	No
Amount of time allocated to collaboration (weekly)	1-3 hours	1-3 hours	5-6 hours	1-3 hours

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Interviews revealed that most TAM classes have little time or structure for collaboration. This is an important factor when looking at students' success rates. The fifty-seven percent of special education students that were successful in physical science TAM classes leaves forty-three percent failing, still too large a number. Also apparent is that there is no one TAM model used in our school. Most are *lead and support* with

teachers stating there are no guidelines for roles and responsibilities of teachers. Individual Education Plans are not being read by all co-teachers; the culprit again is time. Teachers' end of year summaries demonstrate a willingness to work collaboratively with the proper direction and time afforded.

Interviews with Learning Focused School Team

The Learning Focused School Team was created as part of a district wide professional development initiative to meet the needs of our diverse learners. Each school in the district has a team. Our team is comprised of six teachers and the principal. After working with the team for eight months to present four mini seminars on organizing learning, I asked their assessment of our team. A combination of answers gives us a view of what the team is about.

Our goal is to communicate and demonstrate researched based teaching strategies that would organize different styles more efficiently for higher student achievement. We have just planted seeds to the faculty and although we have a long road ahead to achieve quantitative results, we are in the right direction and have more going for us than against us. After four months more than 80% are using organizational strategies to mirror

consistency, such as essential questions. Teachers are calling teachers to ask whether this sounds like a good essential question. Nothing is slower or more consistent than change. The culture of our school can change when we start with the putting out continual positive attitudes and we have a synergetic learning model. We have to expect coherence of teaching strategies and it has to be controlled qualitatively. We've organized faculty presentations, neighborhood visits and other activities that support learning and demonstrate that we can become a collaborative community.

The LEARNING FOCUSED SCHOOL TEAM Neighborhood Visit

Sussex Central High School					
A Learning Focused School					
Neighborhood Visit					
Date:	Subject:		Beginning/Middle/End of Class (circle one)		
Teacher:	Activating	Acquisition	Summarizing	Extending/ Refining	Yes/No/ Other/Type/ Comment Yes = √ No = X
Type of Lesson					
Strategy (see list)					
Organizer & Type (see list)					
Evidence of Focus Vocabulary					
Essential Question or BIG IDEA or Objective					

Neighborhood visits revealed diverse and differential teaching strategies throughout the school.

Strategies			
Activating	Acquisition	Summarizing	Extending/Refining
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OWL Wordplash Capable Vocabulary Sentence & Word Expansion Anticipation Guide Prediction Guide Brainstorm Web Colorpencil Draw Picture/Diagram 3 minute pause Note-taking power notes Two-Column Notes Main Ideas - Detail Notes Book Notes - Discussion Notes Opinion - Proof Hypothetical - Proof Problem - Solution Notes Mnemonic System Think Alouds Flow Charts Find Errors Try a specific skill Pattern puzzles Seed discussions Sticky-note discussions Charting Practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline Essential Question Collaborative Pairs Doing Activity Self-Assess Peer-Assess Teacher-Assess Study-Groups/Feedback Open-Ended Response Think/Write/Discuss Demonstration Memory Aids Mind Map Visual Charts Acrostics Acronyms Hookups Picture Objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ticket Out Reflection Questions Study Cards Important Thing About Learning Logs Summarizing Prompts Graphic Organizer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparing Analogies/metaphors Classifying ordering, attributing Induction generalizing/hypothesizing Deduction categorical arguments Error Analysis bias, fallacies, credibility Abstracting relationships Constructing Support Persuasion Analyzing Perspectives Viewpoints

Strategies looked for during Neighborhood Visits

Staff Development
Evaluation /
Feedback

Memo

To: All Staff
From: Dr. Hall And LFS Team
CC:
Date: 3/1/2005
Re: Evaluation / Feedback on 2/28/2005 Staff Inservice

Time ran out for us yesterday to include this in the activities. Please take a moment to give us some feedback on the staff inservice held Monday, 2/28/2005.

Positives: — Word wall gave us an appreciation of all that's been thrown at us over the past four years. The promise of being given help to best employ some of the "tools" in our "tool boxes" gives hope — we need to be able to bring it all together.

Negatives: — Couldn't hear the Seattle Fish Market video — this ~~was~~ a great instruction — but lots couldn't hear or see it — you lost a lot at the beginning — they couldn't come back.

Areas for Improvement next time: It was obvious that the staff (teachers) put a lot into this. That helps that there are peer trainers.

What can we do to enhance your learning experience? Keep going — try to anticipate audio/visual problems if there is to be a visual presentation —

*Return to Dr. Hall's mailbox once you have completed this.

Thank you, LFS Team

SCHS-LFS Team
FACULTY TICKET OUT THE DOOR #1
February, 2005

What questions do you have?
WHERE DO Q'S GO AFTER
UNIT IS OVER?

What did you like?
PACE, ATTITUDE,
SEINFELD

SCHS
Learning Focused School

SOCRATES' ACCENT
What didn't you like?

TO INVOLVE STUDENTS
IN DISCOVERING
MAJOR CONCEPTS
Why is it important for EVERY
CLASSROOM, and EVERY
TEACHER to use an EQ?

SCHS-LFS Team
FACULTY TICKET OUT THE DOOR #2
March, 2005

Ticket out the Door

HOW DOES A CONCEPT
STAND STRONG?

teach vocab, engage interest,
build background, teach concept,
learning strategies

YOUR OPINION CONCERNING
TODAY'S MEETING:

I LIKED: "Wax on-Wax off"
short, sweet & to the point.

I DIDN'T LIKE: everything was well done
(no problems)

MY SUGGESTION(S):

Continue feeding us

Ticket out the Door

HOW DOES A CONCEPT
STAND STRONG?

By using the different learning
strategies as well as developing
& implementing them in our classes

YOUR OPINION CONCERNING
TODAY'S MEETING:

I LIKED: I think it is good to
have these activities to think about
how & what we are doing in our classes

I DIDN'T LIKE:

That we can know each other
a bit better as co-workers.

MY SUGGESTION(S):

Maybe to
6

TICKET OUT



FEEDBACK

How did we do? *Good Video - Creative as always!!*

3 Things I learned about organizing my teaching from Yoda

- Break learning into smaller attainable tasks
- be patient
- model proper techniques/beh

2 Ways I'll try to maximize student learning in my class

- Ensure the student are involved in learning activities that maximize learning
- switch activities frequently

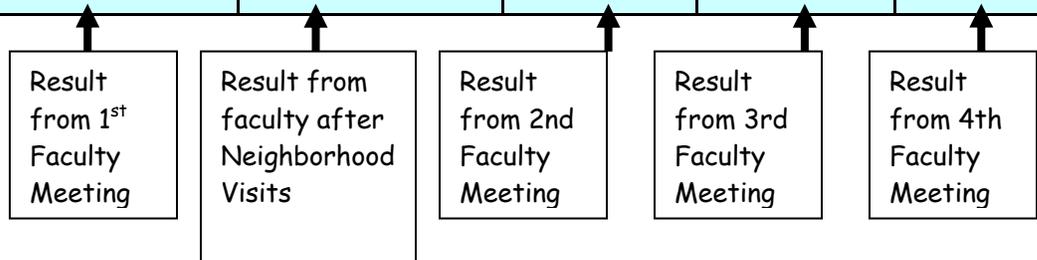
1 Dead horse I'll ride a little less

- trying to/worrying about assigning blame

Using a Ticket Out after each faculty presentation allowed faculty to summarize and evaluate our activity. Response was consistently positive.

SUMMARY OF TICKET OUT SURVEYS

TICKET OUT Properties	Collaboration	Neighborhood Visits	Essential Questions	Activating Strategies	Teaching Strategies
<i>Response to Big Idea of Faculty Meeting</i>	To endorse a plan for student achievement that enforces collaborative teaching	To determine what collaborative teaching strategies and methods are currently being used in our school.	To make teachers aware of the essential questions, and how they can incorporate them into their lessons	To show teachers how to initiate strategies to incorporate collaborative teaching	To give examples of some collaborative teaching ideas
<i>Examples of Positive Responses</i>	1. Themes to tie things together 2. Tool Boxes” help teachers to use ALL of their tools in the classroom 3. Community sense to include both teachers as well as all the students	1. Good use of objectives as well as use of the central questions	1. To get students into new habits that involve using the questions 2. To encourage students to focus their learning 3. Consistency in the classroom	1. Small group work 2. Varied activities 3. Visual and hands on examples	1. Don't leave any students behind 2. Learn by doing 3. Be a master of your subject
<i>Responses that will help collaborate teaching strategies and build a Professional Learning Community</i>	Encourage teachers to work together to encourage learning	Helps monitor how collaborative teaching is actually being used	Help students to relate better to more than one idea, yet still be able to focus	Uses different ways of incorporating collaboration without overwhelming	Completes collaboration ideas by letting each teacher use their own strategies yet still be flexible to others



UNIT/CONCEPT:
Learning Focused Schools

Essential Question (EQ):
How do we become a learning focused school?
(How do we make sure that everyone catches the fish/concept?)

**Key Questions:
(LEQ's)**

Essential Questions
How does a concept grow legs?
(gaining student interest, inspiring exploration)

Activation/Acceleration
How does a concept stand strong?
(building support, scaffolding, vocabulary)

Teaching
How do you teach a concept to run?
(application, practice, extending, refining)

Summarizing
How do you know if the concept won the race?
(answer the E.Q., evidence of student learning)

Some Quotes to Consider:

"Let us walk together and perhaps we will gain strength from each other." -Eisenhower

"...in a professional community of learners we do not fight our battles alone." -Terry Weeks (1988 National Teacher of the Year)

"Collaboration does not work by invitation alone." -Richard Dufour

"Every great leader is clearly teaching, and every great teacher is clearly leading." -John Gardner

"In times of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future." -Eric Hoffer

- Key Concepts (Vocabulary):**
- Shared Vision
 - STARfish philosophy
 - Commit
 - Be It
 - Coach It
 - Collaboration
 - Acquisition Lesson
 - Essential Question
 - Activating Acceleration
 - Previewing Focus Vocab.
 - Concept Mapping
 - Teaching Extending Refining
 - Summarizing
 - Learning Units
 - Graphic Organizers
 - Rubrics
 - Diversified Learning
 - Implementation
 - Professional Learning Community

Summary and Conclusion

"He who dares to teach must never
cease to learn." - Anonymous

Beneath the foundation of our brand new school is a culture that carries the renewable resource of learning. The Age has come to develop the process to renew that resource, and that is the process of collaboration. As a Professional Learning Community, co-teaching (TAM) classes will no longer look like a black hole. By organizing our tools of teaching we can establish a consistent structure that students can recognize and is inherent within our culture. Our vision for ALL students to achieve learning success is possible.

There is not a factor of the process that includes isolationism; we have to pool our resources. We have to learn to share the roles we play in the classroom and alter the existing belief so our culture can reflect a Professional Learning Community. Dufour (2004) is succinct in stating that teachers must stop making excuses not to collaborate with curriculum, assessment and intervention (p 9).

Collaboration takes time, dedication and commitment. How can we build this community of collaboration, but more importantly how do we sustain it? It starts with profound leadership to make profound decisions.

The Great Seal of the United States displays an inscription below the pyramid that reads in Latin *Novus Ordo Seclorum* (A new Order of the Ages). I think the time has come to restructure our secondary school to meet the new age of collaboration, intervention and professionalism.

Policy Recommendations

We're going to have the best-educated
American people in the world

- Dan Quayle

- ◆ **Required pre-service professional development courses for all educational professionals co-teaching or working with student of special needs or at-risk.** This course or workshop would be developed by special educators and general teachers that have co-taught in the school.
- ◆ **Restructure of time for professionals in Secondary Schools.** Teachers should have established collaboration time that is imbedded each day in the school year. This would not be part of teacher 'prep' time, but outside the time students are in classes, such as in early morning or one hour after school.

- ◆ **Development of a professional tier organizational structure for Secondary Schools.** Use education professionals who have achieved different levels of knowledge, expertise, and responsibility as supervisors or captains to supervise a collaborated team of teachers, distributing roles of leadership. (This cannot be in addition to teaching six/seven courses each day.)

New Ideas - New Questions for Research

A leader is a deal in hope.
Napoleon Bonaparte

- ✓ How can a web page that has structured data tables assist daily/weekly collaboration of teachers?
- ✓ How would having courses offered either in early a.m. or evening effect rate of graduation for special education students?
- ✓ What alternatives can special ed and at-risk students use for core subject credit? Can we use pathway courses, such as agriscience for science class? Can we use shadowing/work programs as credits for science, English or even math?

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Coming together
is a beginning,
staying together
is progress,
and working together
is success.



- Henry Ford