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Creating Community among Colleagues: A Call to Collaboration

Abstract

Teaching has traditionally been a lonely enterprise. Working in isolation is commonplace. Collaboration among teachers is rare, particularly at the high school level. How can Christian high schools be more purposeful in developing an ethos in which collaboration among faculty is encouraged and expected? Teachers will need to be taught how to collaborate. Teachers will have to develop attitudes of openness and trust. Administrative leadership will need to implement structures and strategies that promote a collaborative environment. Christians are called to live in community with each other. To that end much can and should be done to promote collaboration among teachers in Christian high schools.

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Creating Community among Colleagues: A Call to Collaboration

by

Thomas J. Knapper

(B.A. Dordt College, 1988)

Thesis
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Creating Community among Colleagues: A Call to Collaboration

by

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Abstract

Teaching has traditionally been a lonely enterprise. Working in isolation is commonplace. Collaboration among teachers is rare, particularly at the high school level. How can Christian high schools be more purposeful in developing an ethos in which collaboration among faculty is encouraged and expected? Teachers will need to be taught how to collaborate. Teachers will have to develop attitudes of openness and trust. Administrative leadership will need to implement structures and strategies that promote a collaborative environment. Christians are called to live in community with each other. To that end much can and should be done to promote collaboration among teachers in Christian high schools.

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To collaborate is "to work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort" (Webster, 1993). Parents collaborate on how to best raise their children. Business partners collaborate on how to manage their business. Church leaders collaborate about effective programs. Congressmen collaborate on how government should operate. Military leaders collaborate over strategy. Collaboration is discussing ideas. It is making suggestions. It's offering positive feedback. In short, collaboration is working together to do something better than it could be done alone. It is using the expertise of another to become more of an expert oneself.

Research suggests that collaboration among teachers has had a positive impact on teachers as well as students. Yet it has been my experience in Christian high schools that collaboration is not happening much. Teachers arrive in the morning and perhaps gather over a cup of coffee to discuss the news or other personal issues before classes begin, but then it's off to their classrooms to do their jobs in isolation. Visiting with coworkers about current events is not a bad thing. In fact this collegiality is healthy and helps establish good relationships among staff. But could these conversations be extended to help each other become better teachers? What would that look like? This paper intends to address the issue of collaboration by seeking answers to the following questions:

1. What are the results of teacher collaboration?

2. Why should collaboration happen among teachers in a Christian high school?

3. What are other schools doing to promote collaboration among faculty?

4. What can a Christian high school do to foster an ethos in which purposeful and meaningful collaboration can take place?

Definition of Terms

Christian school – A Christian school is a school where faith and learning are interconnected. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge is not true knowledge until it is acted upon. Therefore learning leads to discipleship – following and serving Jesus Christ.

Collaborative Culture – This paper addresses the issue of developing a culture (or ethos) of collaboration among teachers in Christian high schools. What characterizes a collaborative culture? According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1996), collaborative cultures

consist of pervasive qualities, attitudes, and behaviors that run through staff

relationships on a moment-by-moment, day-by-day basis. Help, support, trust and

openness are at the heart of these relationships. Beneath that, there is a commitment

to valuing people as individuals and valuing the groups to which people belong

(48).

Collaboration – Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) identify four types of collegial relations: scanning and storytelling, help and assistance, sharing, and joint work. It is the fourth one, joint work that is at the heart of collaboration as defined in this paper. "Joint work implies and creates stronger interdependence, shared responsibility, collective commitment and improvement, and greater readiness to participate in the difficult business of review and critique" (47).

Collegiality – Collegiality is defined as the relationship of colleagues (Webster, 1993). Although a relationship between colleagues is an important factor in establishing a culture of collaboration, as will be discussed, collegiality by no means guarantees that collaboration will happen.

Ethos – Webster (1993) defines this as "the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution." If part of the ethos of a Christian high school is the concept of community, then not only do the people of that institution believe in it, but they will also do whatever they can to make this concept a reality that permeates every aspect of the school, including faculty interactions.

Peer Coaching – Pellicer and Anderson (1995) define peer coaching as "the process whereby teams of teachers regularly observe one another teaching and provide support and feedback to promote mutual growth for all concerned" (170).

Professional Learning Community – A Professional Learning Community is a community in which teachers are expected to engage in collaborative work and discussion. Within that collaborative work there is a consistent focus on teaching and learning, and there is a continual gathering of assessment and other data to inquire into and evaluate progress and problems over time (Harris et al., 2003).

Teacher efficacy – "Teachers' sense of efficacy is a judgment about capabilities to influence student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Hoy, 2004).

A Review of the Relevant Literature

What are the results of teacher collaboration?

It is well accepted, researched and documented that collaboration among teachers is valuable to the educational process. In *What's Worth Fighting for in Your School* (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996), the authors describe a collaborative school culture that is worth

fighting for and what can be done to get there. The problems they discuss and the recommendations they make are based on extensive research conducted in the area of school improvement. As a result of interviews with teachers, Fullan and Hargreaves showed that

> involving teachers in their schools, supporting and valuing what they do, and helping them to work more closely together as colleagues are not just worthwhile humanitarian things to do for their own sake. They also have an impact on the quality of teaching and learning in our classrooms (2).

Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) describe many problems that thwart the collaborative process in school systems today. These problems are the result of a tension created by simultaneous pressure put on teachers from within and without. The pressure from within comes from wanting to give teachers more freedom to make decisions and wanting to involve them more in the life and work of the school outside the classroom. The pressure from outside comes from things like national curriculum priorities and standardized tests. "This simultaneous bottom-up and top-down tension in bringing about reform is a symptom of fundamental dilemmas and problems in bringing about educational change" (2). Fullan and Hargreaves list six basic problems: overload, isolation, groupthink, untapped competence, narrowness of roles, and failed reform. Of particular importance for this paper are the problems of isolation, groupthink and untapped competence.

Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) also emphasize that the context in which a teacher works is important in promoting collaboration. They conclude that the context called for is "one that embodies a particular *culture* of teaching, a particular set of working relationships among teachers and their colleagues which bind them together in a

supportive, inquiring community, committed to common goals and continuous improvement" (36). Fullan and Hargreaves discuss two types of cultures in which teachers work: individualistic and collaborative. They conclude that the second type, the collaborative culture, leads to improved schools. Fullan and Hargreaves describe the power of collaboration but also some things to beware of when trying to develop such cultures. Developing an ethos in which collaboration among teachers is encouraged and expected is a key ingredient in the authors' discussion. It is something worth fighting for. "Schools are not now places where individual and collaborative growth of teachers (and hence of students) can flourish" (37).

According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) school and teacher improvement are key results of collaboration. It is vitally important that teachers continue to learn throughout their careers (Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004; Barth, 2001; Bezzina, 2006). Barth (2001) gives three reasons why learning for teachers is so important. One reason is that students learn best when teachers learn right along side them. Barth calls this "the extraordinary power of modeling" (28). Secondly, career-long learning replenishes teachers. Educators today are depleted and the only ways to replenish are to leave the hard work of teaching or come alive as a learner. Finally, teachers must continue learning if they want to keep up with the rapidly changing world around them. "In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists" (28).

Learning for teachers can come in various forms. Traditionally, teachers attend in-school training on whatever happens to be the topic of the year. Workshops, conferences, continuing education classes, and conventions are other ways in which teachers learn.

And of course teachers engage in their own private learning. But are teachers learning from each other? According to Kooy (2003), teachers too often understand learning as something that happens *to* them (conferences, workshops, etc.). But knowledge that is obtained through these various forums or simply gained through experience often remains behind closed doors. Real professional development, says Kooy, should be something that happens *with* each other. Collaboration provides opportunities for continuous improvement and career-long learning (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Instead of professional development being seen as a one-shot workshop or conference here and there it instead becomes, in the context of collaboration, a natural part of teachers' work (Shank, 2005).

Collaboration provides opportunities for career-long learning because one of the most common things that happens when teachers collaborate is that they learn from each other (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Johnson, 2003; Shank, 2005; Bezinna 2006; Johnston, Knight, & Miller, 2007). This idea of learning together is highlighted in what have come to be known as "learning communities" or "professional learning communities" (Bezzina, 2006; Barth, 2001; Harris et al., 2003; Fullan, 2004). Although broader in scope than teacher collaboration, research indicates that learning happens best when it occurs within the context of community. "Good policies and ideas take off in learning cultures, and go nowhere in cultures of isolation" (Fullan, 2004, 9). Successful schools are schools that facilitate and promote learning, not only among students, but among teachers as well (Bezzina, 2006; Craig et al., 2005).

Craig et al. (2005) highlight the impact that a positive learning culture has on schools and the role of teacher collaboration in developing and maintaining such cultures

in a case study performed on six high-performing schools in Tennessee. As part of this study, teachers and administrators were asked why student achievement was so high in their schools. The answers given fell into three broad categories: 1) learning culture; 2) school/family/community connections; and 3) effective teaching. Teachers and administrators were then asked about the learning culture of their school. The authors' findings indicated that six characteristics were common to all six high-performing schools: 1) high expectations for students; 2) high expectations for teachers; 3) hard-working, dedicated teachers; 4) teachers treated as professionals; 5) teacher collaboration; and 6) emotionally warm, supportive learning environments. About teacher collaboration the authors state, "Teachers and administrators indicated that teachers in their schools had a high level of professional rapport, worked well together, and frequently had instructionally focused discussions with their colleagues" (18). Comments from teachers suggest that sharing ideas and solving problems together were important aspects of their collaboration. One teacher said, "We [three geometry teachers] have met I think at least once a week just to say how's your class going, where are you, what were your trouble spots, and I'm having trouble with this area, and what did you do to fix or get this" (19).

The fact that collaboration fosters a sharing of ideas appears elsewhere in the literature as well (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Bezzina, 2006; Shank, 2005; Van Dyk, personal communication, 2007). Teachers with experience and expertise are allowed to share their ideas and success stories with their colleagues. By the same token, teachers share and discuss their failures and uncertainties with a view to gaining help and support (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

Contrast this environment in which teachers share ideas with each other and problem-solve together to an environment in which teachers work in isolation, one of the problems in many schools according to Fullan and Hargreaves (1996). Isolation limits access to new ideas. Isolation also means competence goes unnoticed while incompetence gets neglected. No one likes to be told he or she is incompetent, but teachers who work in collaborative cultures, who interact with each other regularly on a professional level, find that incompetence is exposed more naturally and gracefully and is usually done with an eye toward improvement (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

In addition to learning from each other and sharing with each other, teacher collaboration also impacts the uncertainty of the job. Teachers feel more confident about what they do and about the effect that they can have in their classrooms and on students. This is referred to as an increase in a teacher's sense of efficacy (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

Bruce Johnson (2003), associate director of the Center for Research in Education, Equity and Work at the University of South Australia, also discovered that teacher learning is enhanced when teachers collaborate. He conducted a study of four Australian schools: two primary schools, a secondary school, and a secondary college. These schools were chosen for this study because they had received funding as part of a project sponsored by the Australian National Schools Network (ANSN) to implement collaborative working arrangements. Through the study Johnson sought to answer three research questions: What is the nature and extent of collaboration achieved by teachers in the schools? What are teachers' views on the positive and negative features of working collaboratively? What factors promoted and hindered greater collaboration?

Johnson (2003) used interviews and a written questionnaire to gather data. The written questionnaire, which contained both closed and open-ended questions, was made to address the nature of work restructuring undertaken at the schools, the nature, extent, and outcomes of collaborative work, the conditions that promoted collaboration, and the conditions that hindered collaboration. All staff members ($n = 126$) were asked to complete the questionnaire, with 115 teachers responding, resulting in a 91% response rate.

Johnson (2003) interviewed twenty-four people who were purposely chosen to obtain a wide range of perspectives. Among those interviewed were the Principal, someone who was instrumental in promoting increased teacher collaboration (a "key player"), someone who was not wholly in favor of the changes, someone who arrived at the school once the reform process was underway, someone in a non-teaching position, and one other person who was able to provide further insights into the reform process. Through these interviews participants were allowed to share their stories about working collaboratively. Interviews were also intended to validate trends identified in the questionnaire, being structured to cover a similar range of issues.

Data from the questionnaire was analyzed for both individual schools and across schools using the frequency and cross tabulations operations of SPSS (SPSS Inc., 2001). Written comments were transcribed and introduced to the text analysis program, NUD-IST (QSR, 2002).

The results of Johnson's (2003) study uncovered both benefits and problems to collaboration. One benefit cited was that teachers experienced an increased sense of moral support. Almost 90% of the teachers reported experiencing this to "some extent" or

a "great extent." One teacher wrote, "The team/small group approach has shown many positive outcomes especially in the area of support, staff morale and sharing of materials and ideas" (343).

Another benefit was the positive impact that collaboration had on teacher morale. One teacher was quoted as saying, "Self-esteem is higher and we have a greater sense of belonging and ownership" (343). Another teacher said,

> In many ways it has helped to break down a lot of barriers, especially teacher
> isolationism. Now there is a greater sense of, 'We are all in this together' and we
> are all contributing to the growth of the kids in a holistic sense and not just the
> pieces of subjects (343-344).

Feelings of collegiality, trust, and openness appeared to have developed. "Teachers' feelings about their work, their students and themselves were positively affected by planning, discussing, and working in collaborative teams" (344).

Collaboration also provided opportunities for teachers to learn from each other. Over 80% of teachers reported feeling to "some extent" or a "great extent" part of a "learning community" which shared responsibility for ongoing teacher professional development. One teacher was quoted as saying,

> It has been a great experience working collaboratively with another teacher. I have
> learned a lot from her with regard to collaborative teaching and learning. Also, the
> support of another staff member who has already worked in the school for several
> years has been immeasurable (344).

One principal revealed that, "if you open up their minds a little to what their colleagues do, they seem to be able to learn so much from one another – it surprised me and them"

(344). Teachers learned from each other *how* to do their jobs better, gleaning ideas from each other and sharing their expertise, even across subject lines. In addition teachers also indicated that they learned *why* they do what they do. Johnson (2003) states, "Many teachers reported quite fundamental developments in their abilities to reflect on their practice and to locate their teaching within a coherent educational philosophy" (345). One teacher was quoted as saying, "My learning is enhanced because it's put into context. I now make sense of what I do as an educator" (345).

In addition to these benefits, Johnson's (2003) study also revealed some problems with collaboration. Forty percent of the staff identified work intensification as one problem. Teachers in this group complained of more and longer meetings and the fact that teams imposed more responsibility on to team members. One teacher said, "Meeting time and the actual number of meetings seems to have increased rather then decreased as was originally thought or expected" (345). However, 60% of the staff reported that sharing jobs with team members actually led to a reduction in workload to "some" or a "great extent". Comments from this group of teachers focused on staff being freed-up to deal with (behavior) problems and being provided opportunities to share/spread the workload.

About 25% of the teachers felt that a loss of autonomy was a negative consequence of working collaboratively. Some reported feeling constrained while others felt pressured to conform to the group.

A third problem described in Johnson's (2003) study was interpersonal conflict. Judging from comments made by teachers, this was conflict between those who were in favor of collaboration and those who were not. One teacher shared, "Staff who resisted

some change caused friction. Groups were clearly established with a lot of back stabbing occurring. This has since changed, however, but it caused a lot of stress at the time" (348). Another teacher felt that there were some teachers who were more committed than others which led to differing levels of participation.

Factionalism – a divisive competition between teams – was a surprising outcome according to Johnson (2003). Several teachers wrote that, "The staff are pulled in three directions (three teams) and often compete quite fiercely. At times we are a very divided staff with no common goals" (348). Johnson also refers to this divisiveness as "balkanization," a problem that Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) mention as well. Competition between teams led to a breakdown of communication and therefore a school-wide collaborative culture was not embraced.

Johnson (2003) concludes that reforming working relations in order to foster teacher collaboration is not only possible, it is also mostly desirable. He bases this conclusion on the many identified benefits of increased teacher collaboration that were reported by participating teachers. However, he readily admits that there were some teachers who were negatively affected, as evidenced by the disadvantages cited, and that implementing team based collaboration is both complex and intriguing. Johnson states,

> there was sufficient evidence of micropolitical 'infighting' to suggest that particular
> disciplining practices were used by dominant coalitions to promote teacher
> collaboration and to defend it against other groups and individuals who questioned
> its purposes and efficacy.... Clearly, implementing greater teacher collaboration in
> these four schools was good for most teachers, but not so good for others (349).

Van Dyk (personal communication, 2007) was asked (see Appendix) what happens when teachers are encouraged and expected to collaborate. He notes that collaboration among teachers often generates the following results. Teachers sense they are not alone in dealing with problems. Collegiality and camaraderie climb to a new, professional level. Opportunities emerge to bring the concept and experience of "spiritual community" to a larger, practical level. Van Dyk readily admits that there will be those who resist or who give only lip service to collaboration. Some will be threatened by the sharing that takes place. Some will simply be unwilling to share "what works for them" with others.

In summary, collaboration among teachers has had many positive results. Teachers learn from each other (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Johnson, 2003; Shank, 2005; Bezinna 2006; Johnston et al., 2007). Teachers who collaborate are more confident of themselves (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996) and feel better about their jobs (Johnson, 2003). Collaboration promotes sharing among teachers (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Bezzina, 2006; Shank, 2005; Van Dyk, personal communication, 2007). Teachers brainstorm together (Shank, 2005) and problem-solve together (Van Dyk, personal communication; Shank, 2005). Teachers who collaborate experience an increased sense of moral support (Johnson, 2003). Finally, collaboration allows opportunities for the concept of "spiritual community" to emerge in a practical way (Van Dyk, personal communication, 2007). It is this final result that is the impetus for why a *Christian* school should encourage collaboration.

Why should collaboration happen in Christian high schools?

Collaboration is valuable to the educational process. It gets positive results. Though there are some limitations, overall, based on solid research, collaboration appears to be a good idea. In addition to the findings presented thus far, *Christian* schools have even more reason to encourage teachers to collaborate.

One of the most important results of collaboration according to Van Dyk (personal communication, 2007) is that it allows opportunities for the concept of "spiritual community" to take shape. Van Dyk states,

> Christian high schools, like all other Christian schools, should exemplify the Body of Christ. We Christians are members of one another, sharing each other's joys and carrying each other's burdens, even confessing our sins to each other. A key ingredient in demonstrating community is the principle of collaboration.

Van Dyk (2007) suggests that our call to community is not restricted to a "spiritual society of churchgoers" thus rejecting the effects of dualism, but rather the call to community "is one of a number of foundational assumptions for our work" (58).

In her article entitled *Christian Schooling as "Communities of Truth,"* Kooy (2003) talks about this same concept – the need for community in our Christian schools. According to Kooy, our Christian schools are ideally situated to reject and counter the individualism that is so prevalent in education and in society as a whole. The idea of community in Christian schools involves students and teachers living and learning together. Like Van Dyk, Kooy says that Christian schools need to exemplify the Body of Christ. She says, "we have to capture the essence of interdependence, of working a

"body" model such as the one pictured in Romans 12" (6). An important way in which teachers do this is by working together in collaborative environments.

Vander Stelt (2007) provides some foundational underpinnings of this concept of collaboration. He notes that there are two possible reasons why Christians can worship together on Sundays, talk about being a community of believers, sing about being one in the Spirit, and yet work in such isolation.

The first reason Vander Stelt (2007) suggests is that teachers simply don't sense the need for collaboration. They think they are perfectly capable of doing their job on their own. Besides, every teacher has his own area of expertise (particularly true in the high school setting) and doesn't really need anyone else's input (in complete contrast to the Body of Christ image spelled out in Ephesians 4 and I Corinthians 12). Wheelan (2005), author of *Faculty Groups: From Frustration to Collaboration*, agrees with this assessment. According to Wheelan, teachers who don't see the need for collaboration wonder how working with other faculty members is going to improve their individual performance in their own classrooms.

The second reason according to Vander Stelt (2007) is that teachers are afraid, for to collaborate means to reveal yourself to your colleagues. What you do and how you do things becomes visible for all to see, and this can be scary. Not only is it scary but for many teachers it is risky (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). There is the risk of incompetence being exposed. There is also the risk of not being able to live up to the expectations of one's colleagues. "If (teachers) cannot ever do enough in their own eyes, how could they possibly meet the expectations of others" (43)? Nevertheless, despite the risks, the call to

live in community with one another ought to be exemplified in the way teachers interact with one another.

In addition to the reasons Vander Stelt mentions, Wheelan (2005) gives another reason why teachers continue to work in isolation. According to Wheelan, many teachers don't know how to work with others. Teachers learn very well the technical aspects to their jobs, but very little is done to instruct them to be productive members or leaders in a group.

In spite of the evidence (practical, theoretical, and philosophical) supporting collaboration, it has been my experience that teachers in Christian schools do very little of it. I have taught in two Christian high schools and in both situations collaboration among faculty has been limited to faculty meetings where the entire faculty gathers to discuss topics that rarely have anything to do with what teachers do in the classroom or why they do what they do. The occasional meeting where classroom practice is discussed is rarely followed up with purposeful discussions that would allow for further processing and implementation of ideas together.

Collaboration ought to happen in Christian high schools. The fact that the results of collaboration are so positive in other schools should get the attention of those who work in Christian schools. However, encouraging teachers in Christian schools to collaborate simply because collaboration works really well in other schools is not a good enough reason. Christian schools ought to encourage teachers to collaborate because of the broader foundational principle that undergirds it, namely the concept of spiritual community. As Van Dyk (personal communication, 2007) so eloquently points out, "A key ingredient in demonstrating community is the principle of collaboration."

What are high schools doing to promote a culture of collaboration among faculty?

There are many examples of high schools that do engage in collaborative cultures. Specific strategies and structures can be utilized to ensure a successful collaborative school. Barbara Gideon (2002), principal of David Crockett High School in Austin, Texas, illustrates this in strategically moving her school from individualistic to collaborative. She says that in order for collaboration to be successful, it must first of all address issues teachers find immediately useful. Because collaboration requires time and effort, teachers are likely to give up unless they see results. Secondly, it must be structured into a teacher's regular workday. Because teachers are already very busy people, asking them to get together before or after school will likely meet with opposition.

There are five structures that Gideon (2002) has put in place to help foster collaboration: a campus leadership team, learning communities, grade-level meetings, department meetings and cadres. Each of these groups is responsible for a unique aspect of what happens at David Crockett and each has been given clear objectives as to what they are expected to discuss and accomplish.

The campus leadership team is comprised of department chairs, assistant principals and the principal. They meet weekly to discuss curricular concerns and visit classrooms. Conversations are focused around teaching and learning and team members are careful not to allow other issues or distractions from taking up their time. Together they discuss student achievement, review course work plans, study instructional techniques, and share techniques for work in the departments. Through this venue Gideon is able to develop

skills and confidence in her department chairs and assistant principals and model effective instructional leadership.

Additionally, groups of teachers that have curricular commonalties are grouped together to form learning communities. Led by assistant principals, department chairs, and other teacher leaders chosen by their colleagues, these groups meet bi-weekly to share successes, discuss student achievement, analyze data, share instructional strategies, and plan a cohesive delivery of instruction. "The learning community structure has become the primary means of building a common coordinated instructional delivery system at Crockett" (Gideon, 2002, 33).

In grade-level meetings teachers discuss the needs of students they have in common. Teachers of freshmen share a common conference period and meet twice a week with their assistant principals, counselors, and team leaders. Teachers of grades 10 – 12 meet weekly during a common lunch. These meetings allow teachers to bring up student concerns such as attendance, behavior, or other issues that affect achievement. Perhaps certain students are struggling in all classes, or perhaps certain teachers are able to connect with students with whom other teachers find it difficult to connect. Discovering these things together allows teachers, counselors, and principals to make adjustments or to intervene immediately to address situations within their control.

According to Gideon (2002), learning communities and grade-level meetings provide the foundational structure for collaboration. In addition, teachers at Crockett have regular department meetings to address housekeeping issues and to ensure that students receive common core experiences in each subject. These meetings also enable teachers to

share planning and preparation. For example, science teachers take turns setting up labs, saving time for teachers and ensuring that students receive similar experiences.

A final structure that Gideon (2002) has put in place is what she calls cadres. Cadres are groups of teachers that meet on an as-needed basis to plan and implement school projects and deal with common concerns. Examples include studying ways to improve attendance, looking at positive ways to improve disciplinary issues, and working to improve school climate.

These are the structures that have successfully led to fostering an ethos of collaboration among teachers at David Crockett High School. Gideon (2002) readily admits that the venues may differ for different schools. However, "structures to support the time and purpose of group endeavors along with real results will sustain collaboration in a school and forever change the way it conducts business" (34).

Implementing structures that support the time and purpose of group endeavors has also been extremely successful in promoting a collaborative culture in other schools. Shank (2005) observed teachers at Poland Regional High School in rural Maine in order to find out how the collaborative culture there was being sustained. She discovered that the administration at this school was providing its teachers with common space, common time, and common work in order to promote collaboration among its teachers.

In the traditional high school setting, each teacher has his or her own classroom. Each teacher's planning time is used for his or her own individual purposes and is not specifically coordinated with that of anyone else on staff. Not so at Poland Regional. Office space is shared by 10-12 faculty members who are put together for specific reasons (co-teaching teams, cross-curricular grade-level teams, and content area teachers)

by the administration. Consequently, teachers also share classrooms with other teachers, taking whatever supplies and teaching materials they need with them. This prevents an attitude of "this is my classroom" and instead promotes an attitude of sharing.

Workspace is not the only thing that is shared. Teachers at Poland Regional also share successes and challenges. They express to each other the frustrations of teaching. They learn new ideas from each other, and they envision possibilities together. Because of the structures that are in place it is easy for teachers to seek advice from their colleagues. Instead of having to go and knock on someone else's classroom door, feeling like an intruder on private space and time, teachers can simply lean over or pop their head up over the cubical wall and converse with another teacher (Shank, 2005).

Providing common space for teachers to work together would be unproductive if it were not combined with common time. The combination allows teachers to plan together, problem solve together, jointly assess students' work, and consult with parents and students in a group setting. The support that teachers receive from each other has proven to be invaluable, especially for new teachers. Teachers learn from each other on a daily basis and so professional development becomes a natural part of teachers' work. "The common space and time surround the new teachers with what one new teacher calls the 'flow of collaborative energy'" (Shank, 2005, 18).

Even if teachers share a common planning time in a common space it is still possible to work alone. Having common work prevents this from happening at Poland Regional. Certain structural features of the curriculum create common tasks that require collaboration. These features are standards-based assessment, advisory groups, grade-level teams, and integrated curriculum. Because grading is standards-based, teachers of

common classes or grade levels must work together to clarify curricular standards and quality requirements. There needs to be a consistency in the way students are assessed and evaluated, necessitating a measure of collaboration among teachers. Advisory groups consist of 10-12 students and a faculty advisor. The faculty member is responsible for advising this group of students throughout their high school career. The students in these groups engage in different tasks each year, and so the advisors meet monthly to coordinate responsibilities, curricular objectives, and projects.

Groups of five teachers supervise what are known as grade-level teams: teams of 60-80 students of the same grade level. These teams of teachers support each other through classroom management issues, organization, and assessment practices as well as help each other get to know the students.

A final feature that requires collaboration is an integrated curriculum. At Poland Regional the English and social studies curriculums are integrated. Teachers in these departments collaborate to design curriculum and assessments and to plan pedagogical approaches for groups of 40 students. Other departments also collaborate carefully on courses they teach in common. So although teachers enjoy the "collaborative flow of energy" that comes with common space and time, these structures further ensure that collaboration happens at Poland Regional High School (Shank, 2005).

Shank (2006) also conducted a qualitative case study at a Midwestern rural high school of 950 students and 60 faculty members. She surveyed teachers who were part of a Collaborative Inquiry Group (CIG) in order to determine the effects of storytelling on creating a collaborative learning space for teachers.

Shank (2006) found that when teachers revealed something of their own teaching practice about which they had doubts that meaningful sharing started to take place. Sharing authentic stories of their own practice involved taking risks and admitting doubts, but when this happened, group members began to trust each other and a true learning space was created.

In this learning space teachers continued to tell stories that enabled not only the story teller to reflect on his own practice but also allowed those who listened to reflect on their practice. Together they would hear each other's stories and share ideas, offer feedback, give support and encourage each other. Not only were they able to look at their own practice through others' stories, but they were also able to gain a vision of what might be in their own classrooms.

Storytelling also enabled group members to move beyond the personal-practical to the collective-conceptual and back again. In other words teachers were able to take personal, practical stories and use them to discuss broader, more conceptual issues and underlying assumptions. This helps put one's teaching practice into a larger context and also helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The stories told helped shape norms of practice. Teachers were able to see what was working for other teachers. What were other teachers expecting from the students? How did they hold them accountable? How were they challenging students and helping them meet those challenges? As Shank (2006) states, "Sustained over time, the collaborative storytelling was essential for framing a shared vision for pedagogical practice" (720).

Shank (2006) concludes from this study, "Storytelling is…an important element in building the collegial relationships that foster serious and sustained collaborative

deliberation of pedagogical issues" (721). But the process was ineffective until teachers started sharing personally authentic stories within the realm of their professional lives. When this happened, and when group members started sharing their doubts and failures, storytelling became a means for creating and learning within a collaborative space.

Recognizing the importance of providing adequate time also fosters a collaborative environment. Johnston et al. (2007) describe what administrative leaders at Papillion-La Vista Public Schools in Nebraska did in order to promote teaming among teachers. Administration in this school district took seriously their responsibility to provide time for teams. Consequently, they initiated some changes. One full day a month was added to the school calendar for staff development. Teachers were directed to use these days to help each other develop strategies to evaluate student assessments and target instruction based on the results. However, simply giving teachers an extra day to work together doesn't mean collaboration will automatically happen because teaching traditionally happens in cultures of isolation. In fact, it is likely that most teachers will do what has been asked of them *alone*. For this reason, administrative leadership established a protocol. Every teacher was trained to follow certain procedures and guidelines. In this case each teacher was given specific things to look for and student evidence to gather in order to report back to their team for sharing, feedback, and assistance. The protocol may differ from situation to situation, depending on the topic being examined. Throughout the process teachers were encouraged to be reflective and analytical (in this case about students' work). After being trained, each teacher was assigned to a team by the principal. The teams were consistent throughout the year, allowing teachers to develop relationships and hold each other accountable.

In addition to monthly staff development days, teachers who teach the same grade-level or same course met weekly to discuss predetermined topics. At the time this article was written high school teams only met twice a month, but plans were under way to allow them to meet once a week as well. Meetings generally lasted 50 minutes. Teachers would begin meeting 30 minutes before students arrive and continue meeting 20 minutes into the first part of the day while other staff were called upon to "cover" for them. Again, a protocol was set by asking specific questions, keeping the discussion focused and productive.

At the conclusion of the article Johnston et al. (2007) ask if creating time for teachers to work together is really making a difference. The district believes it is. Teaming has led to high-quality professional learning for all staff and it has led to improved teaching.

At Illiana Christian High School time has been provided to encourage collaboration. Once each semester teachers get together in what are known as "teacher of" meetings (also referred to as grade-level meetings). At these meetings all teachers who teach freshmen, for example, get together after school to discuss issues involving students in the freshmen class. Guidance counselors and principals attend these meetings as well. This venue allows teachers to hear what is working for other teachers. Perhaps one teacher is having particular difficulty connecting with a certain student. He expresses this to the group and one of two things may happen. The first is that other teachers share the same frustrations. This helps teachers realize that they are not in this alone. The second thing that happens is that, after showing empathy, teachers offer advice, either first hand from having dealt with this same student or advice from similar past experiences. Often

some teachers are aware of events taking place outside of school that may be affecting a particular student's performance in school. This information is shared, not to be spread as gossip, but rather to help see students as whole people and not as just students, which teachers are often guilty of. It also may be the case that one teacher knows a student's family better than others and so encourages communicating with parents. Guidance counselors also make note of students who are struggling academically so they can intervene with appropriate guidance and assistance. Principals also glean from these conversations which students may be getting into trouble a little too often. They can then do what needs to be done to guide students into more constructive behavior. These meetings are successful in promoting an atmosphere in which teachers, counselors, and principals work together for the benefit of the students.

In order for collaboration to happen, administrative leadership makes it a priority by somehow structuring it into a teacher's regular workday. Sometimes this structure takes shape in the forming of teams of teachers that meet together for predetermined and specific purposes, as is the case at David Crockett High School (Gideon, 2002) and Papillion-La Vista Public Schools (Johnston et al., 2007). Other ways of making it happen are by letting teachers share common space, common time, and common work (Shank, 2005) or by giving teachers a tool to use to promote collaboration such as storytelling (Shank, 2006). Regardless of the structure used, teachers need to see results and administrative leadership needs to give its full support.

What can a Christian high school do to foster a collaborative ethos among faculty?

There are some general considerations to take into account when seeking to promote collaboration. First of all, approaching collaboration with the right attitude can make a big difference. Teachers who are committed, generous, open to change, eager to learn, and who see beyond their own successes and failures are more likely to engage in successful collaborations with their colleagues (Sergiovanni, 1992). Vanderhoek (1993) states, "Teachers must learn to trust each other, to be open to give and take support, and to share successes and problems" (16). Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) emphasize the need for relationships between teachers to be reciprocal. If cooperative relationships are to exist it is imperative to communicate needs as help-givers as well as help-receivers. Van Dyk (2007) also addresses this issue when he talks about teachers being "consultants" to each other (46). No one teacher knows it all. Rather, teachers need to be open to learn from each other and support each other. When this happens, as was mentioned earlier, the broader concept of "spiritual community" has opportunity to take root (Van Dyk, personal communication, 2007).

In addition to having a proper attitude it is also helpful to have a plan or a set of guidelines that groups use to facilitate meaningful discussion. Van Dyk (2007) gives some practical suggestions in his book *Fostering a Reflective Culture in the Christian School: The Maplewood Story*. Teachers at Maplewood are encouraged to become members of what are called CRAGs (Collaborative Reflective Accountability Groups). But they don't get together to talk about just anything, they *reflect* together. Reflection is important in the pursuit of developing a collaborative culture (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Teachers in Johnson's (2003) case study found that the opportunity to reflect with

colleagues proved valuable in helping them "locate their teaching within a coherent educational philosophy" (345).

Collaboratively reflecting together consists of three facets: foundational reflection, reflection in action, and reflective review. These three facets are followed in sequence in the *Maplewood Story.* As such they provide a set of guidelines that the CRAGs used to focus their discussions. Foundational reflection causes the teacher to think about what he considers to be the foundational principles and assumptions on which his teaching practice is based. Foundational reflection seeks to clarify the connection between our worldview (what we believe about God, human life, the world, etc.) and what we believe about education. Reflection in action continually examines whether or not what is happening in the educational process is an expression of one's foundational assumptions. It seeks to bridge the gap between theory/philosophy and practice, a gap that is often very large. Reflective review checks to see if what was done is attuned to foundational principles.

Van Dyk (2007) mentions four tools that can be used to foster collaborative reflection among CRAGs. The first of these tools is questioning. The use of questions is very effective in guiding and focusing discussions. CRAGs used questions to help each other articulate basic principles and assumptions. Questions associated with this type of foundational reflection often ask "what". What do we believe about God? What do we believe about schooling? Reflection in action asks "why" questions. Why choose this classroom arrangement? Why use this teaching strategy? Reflective review asks "how". How does what I did today reflect my foundational assumptions?

A second tool used to prompt reflection is the identification of "trigger points". A trigger point is something that happens in class that begs for reflection. It could be major, such as a student outburst, or it could be something less dramatic such as saying the wrong thing in response to a student's question. These events provide good starting points for discussion and reflection on one's teaching.

A third tool that Van Dyk (2007) mentions is the use of metaphor. The teaching practice can be described by metaphor. Classic examples are the classroom as a circus or a zoo, or teachers as drill sergeants. For example, if teachers are seen as drill sergeants, do students feel comfortable enough to engage in learning? Shouldn't students feel comfortable as we strive to make the concept of community a reality in Christian schools? In this "learning community" shouldn't teachers be learning alongside students? Are drill sergeants seen as teachers who learn with those they teach? Identifying and unpacking metaphors are great forms of reflection.

A final reflective tool is storytelling. Melody Shank (2006) concludes from a study she did on storytelling in a high school setting that "stories can in fact be significant in the creation of a collaborative space that fosters teacher learning, thus breaking through the conventional norms of teaching" (720). Members of storytelling groups committed to attending week long summer institutes on inquiry where they were guided in posing questions and documenting discoveries about those questions with their CIG (Collaborative Inquiry Group) colleagues.

Stories helped teachers improve their practice by facilitating the creation of a certain kind of learning space. They helped the teachers see themselves in new

ways, connect their private worlds of practice to those of others and to broader

educational issues, and develop shared norms of good teaching practice (714).

Questioning, trigger points, metaphor, and storytelling are all helpful tools used to

promote foundational reflection, reflection in action, and reflective review. Together

teachers use this set of guidelines to facilitate discussions in which they are able to learn

from each other and encourage one another.

Another factor to take into consideration when encouraging teachers to collaborate

is to allow participation to be voluntary (Van Dyk, 2007; Shank, 2006; Vanderhoek,

1993). Since traditionally much of teaching is done in isolation, forcing teachers to

collaborate is likely to meet with much resistance. However, when collaboration is

voluntary, interesting things happen. "Examples of collaboration have a way of piquing

the interest of others on staff" (Vanderhoek, 1993, 16). The storytelling group referred to

above started out with seven members, but by the end of the second year thirteen teachers

(almost a fourth of the staff) were participating in the group (Shank, 2006). If

participation is voluntary and collaborative groups are successful, other teachers will be

attracted and the school will be well on the way to establishing a collaborative culture.

It is unlikely, however, that this collaborative culture will reach its full potential

without the support of effective leadership. Administrative leadership that supports

collaboration is probably the single greatest key to implementing and maintaining a

collaborative culture. According to Johnston et al. (2007), "If educators are sincere about

efforts to improve student learning, leaders must take responsibility for providing team

time for teachers and a structure in which they are able to work collaboratively" (15). At

Poland Regional, leadership is so committed to collaboration that when it hires new

teachers, it expects new hires to have both the skills and the desire to work closely with colleagues. Teachers are expected to collaborate. Leadership, from the board to the administration, supports it, and it has met with overwhelming success (Shank, 2005).

Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) emphasize the impact that effective leadership has on any type of improvement effort. If leadership is unsupportive, "the success of teacher efforts will be slim, short-lived or non-existent, and teachers will quickly learn not to make them" (84). This was found to be true in a study performed by Elizabeth Lokon (2003) on a Midwestern high school attempting to develop a collaborative culture. She found that although an ethos of collaboration did have a positive impact on a teacher's work, "the teachers' capacity to actually transform their world of work was hampered…by a lack of leadership…" (15).

Vanderhoek (1993) highlights the role administrative leadership needs to take in developing community within a staff. In his opinion developing a collegial environment is necessary in order to promote collaboration. About developing this environment he states, "The administration must make this a priority for the school. Collegiality cannot be imposed, but when the administration is willing to create conditions for it to occur, it has a much greater chance of developing" (16-17).

Van Dyk (personal communication, 2007) emphasizes the role of leadership when he says, "Promoting collaboration among staff depends on good leadership. Good leadership encourages, provides incentives, and coaxes. Bad leadership imposes from on high." Later in the interview he goes on to say, "Leadership is critical. The right kind of leadership will aim to foster opportunities for collaboration."

Research suggests some very practical ways in which collaboration can be encouraged among teachers. Administrative leadership can start by scheduling time for teachers to work together (Van Dyk, personal communication, 2007; Shank, 2005; Johnston et al., 2007; Gideon, 2002). As stated earlier, teachers at Poland Regional find sharing office space together to be extremely valuable in promoting collaboration (Shank, 2005).

It's worth noting here that although providing time for teachers to work together can lead to effective collaboration, it can also have negative affects. Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) mention three such affects: balkanization, comfortable collaboration, and contrived collegiality. Balkanization (or what was refer to as factionalism by Johnson, 2003) happens when groups formed in order to promote collaboration actually end up competing against each other. Comfortable collaboration fails to address difficult issues. It fails to ask the deeper questions that need to be asked in order to improve one's teaching. Instead collaboration consists of sharing only things that are easy or "comfortable" to share. Contrived collegiality often results when administrators try to implement quick, broad-sweeping initiatives to promote collaboration. Building a collaborative culture takes time (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996) and schools would do well to beware of these negative affects.

One thing that can be done to counteract these negative affects and to promote the development of a positive collaborative culture is to take staff meeting time to explore ways to improve collaboration (Van Dyk, personal communication, 2007). It is vitally important for teachers to engage in career-long learning (Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004; Barth, 2001; Bezzina, 2006). One of the most effective ways that teachers learn is from

each other, in cultures of collaboration (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Johnson, 2003;

Shank, 2005; Bezinna 2006; Johnston, Knight, & Miller, 2007). Therefore, training

teachers in ways to improve collaboration would seem to be a wise use of resources.

Instead of spending (or perhaps wasting) staff development resources on workshops and

in-services, they should be allocated to opportunities for teachers to learn from, observe,

and network with each other (Fullan & Hargreaves (1996). The benefits here will be

more than just a one-shot learning experience (that in reality often goes nowhere).

Teachers teaching each other and learning from each other will result in continual

learning experiences throughout their careers.

Another practical suggestion on the way to promoting collaborative cultures among

teachers is for leadership to allow time for teachers to visit each other's classrooms and

observe each other teaching (Van Dyk, personal communication, 2007; Vanderhoek,

1993). Pellicer and Anderson (1995) refer to this as "peer coaching" and they define it as

"the process whereby teams of teachers regularly observe one another teaching and

provide support and feedback to promote mutual growth for all concerned" (170).

Traditionally being observed is equated to being evaluated. Care must be taken not to

confuse the two here. As Pellicer and Anderson state, "Peer coaching is confidential and

is never used for purposes of evaluation; rather it is intended to foster mutual growth on

the part of the participants" (173).

In *A Vision with a Task* Stronks (1993) gives two other practical suggestions to

promote collaboration among teachers. Both suggestions give teachers a forum in which

to discuss issues directly related to their teaching practice. The first forum is what

Stronks calls "collegial study groups." Collegial study groups involve groups of teachers

meeting together in order to discuss an issue of mutual interest. For example, a group of teachers wants to experiment with a certain teaching strategy. Together they would study the strategy, gather as much information as they could, implement it in their own classrooms, and report back to the group, giving each other support and feedback.

"Collaborative action research" is the second forum that Stronks (1993) mentions. As its title suggests, this forum involves collaboration, action, and research. A collaborative approach recognizes the gifts and insights that different people can contribute and helps teachers break out of the isolation of their classrooms. Action is an important part of the process because a biblical view of knowledge entails responsible action. This action is not a one-time action but rather action followed by an opportunity to reflect on the effects of the action, and then determining what action to take next. In so doing, this process calls for ongoing action. The research part of this process gets teachers involved in finding out in a careful and systematic way about what is going on in their school. Teachers are encouraged to ask questions about the day-to-day actions of teaching and learning and to look for answers that are supported by evidence and argumentation. Collaborative action research is really more or less a formal way of recognizing that teachers have a lot of knowledge that has been gained on the job, and that this knowledge can be used in helping determine how to act appropriately in response to concrete problems.

Most of the examples of collaboration referred to so far are virtually nonexistent in Christian high schools. CRAGs, collegial study groups, peer coaching arrangements, etc. are the exception rather than the norm. There are, however, occasions where groups do meet regularly: curriculum committees, faculty councils, department meetings, etc.

Wheelan (2005) has written a book, *Faculty Groups: From Frustration to Collaboration,* in which she discusses how groups can become more collaborative. In order to accomplish this, it is important to realize that groups go through stages of development somewhat like people do. People experience childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, and old age. According to Wheelan groups go through similar stages as they develop. It is important for members and especially leaders to be aware of these stages of development so that groups can be taken through them systematically in order to become as productive as possible.

Stage one is dependency and inclusion. Just like children need to feel protected and safe and have a measure of structure and consistency in their lives, so it is with members of groups in stage one. Leaders need to create a sense of belonging to the team and an environment in which members feel safe enough to contribute ideas and suggestions.

Stage two is counterdependency and fight. Once members begin to feel safe and secure and the group develops some structure, members begin to feel safe enough to disagree with each other and the leader. Two questions must be answered at this stage: Who are we as a group, and what are our goals and how will we accomplish them?

Stage three is trust and structure. At this stage group members have been able to disagree and work through conflict to reach acceptable agreements on goals and how they plan to achieve those goals. This results in members being able to trust one another and to work collaboratively.

The final stage is work and productivity. At this stage things are getting done. Members are contributing ideas and working together. Disagreements still occur. In fact, task-related conflicts are encouraged, but the key is that they are about the work and not

personal issues and are quickly resolved. Conflict is not only likely to happen when encouraging teachers to collaborate, it is actually a necessary part of healthy group development (Achinstein, 2002). Groups that learn how to debate with each other over task-related issues and arrive at mutually agreeable solutions are much healthier and more productive. In fact, groups that do not engage in healthy conflict can succumb to "groupthink" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Achinstein, 2002). Groupthink is going along with the majority, often being in favor of whatever is popular, just because it's popular. Due to pressure from the group and a desire to *avoid* conflict, individual members do not voice their opinion but rather simply go along with the group. Teachers engaged in worthwhile collaboration will generate conflict. If they learn how to manage it properly they will thrive on it (Achinstein, 2002).

Discussion

Many positive things happen when teachers collaborate. Teachers experience an increase in a sense of efficacy (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996). Because of this teachers are more productive, more efficient, and have a higher sense of morale (Johnson, 2003). Teachers who collaborate don't feel like they are alone in dealing with problems (Shank, 2005; Van Dyk, personal communication, 2007). They discover that sharing ideas and brainstorming together energizes them (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Bezzina, 2006; Shank, 2005; Van Dyk, personal communication, 2007).

The fact that teachers learn a great deal from each other when they get together to plan, problem solve, tell stories or share ideas cannot be overstated. When teachers engage in continual learning throughout their careers, the impact on the environment in

which they work, on their own professional development, and on student achievement is extremely positive. When teachers collaborate, they learn from each other more effectively than any other situation (workshops, conferences, etc.). Inasmuch as schools want their teachers to continue learning, encouraging them to collaborate will be worth the effort (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996; Johnson, 2003; Shank, 2005; Bezzina, 2006; Johnston et al., 2007).

Of course not all results are positive. Some teachers complain that collaboration just adds more work to an already busy schedule. The early stages of developing collaborative cultures may require extra effort on the part of teachers, which is why it is probably a good idea to make it voluntary (Van Dyk, 2007; Shank, 2006; Vanderhoek, 1993). Teachers who want to make it happen will, and others will follow. Although it may be a little painful along the way, most things worth pursuing are.

Some teachers were disappointed with the loss of autonomy that they experienced amid efforts at collaboration (Johnson, 2003). It is important to remember that asking teachers to work together battles against the spirit of individualism, not individuality. Being alone, working alone, taking time to reflect alone are all good and necessary. Respecting people as individuals uniquely created by God with their own gifts and talents is expected. Efforts at collaboration should never downplay the value of each individual. Thus individuality is a good thing. Individualism is completely contrary to what the Bible says. We are called to live in community with one another, to exemplify the Body of Christ. A body, as it says in I Corinthians 12, is made up of many parts but still forms one body. So it is with the community of believers. The individual members of the body are very important and should be valued as such, but we all form one body and therefore

need each other. The Bible is replete with "one another" passages that speak directly to this call to live in community with one another. Love one another (John 13:34). Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10). Instruct one another (Romans 15:14). Serve one another (Gal. 5:13). Teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:13). Encourage one another (I Thes. 5:11). These are just a few examples. These passages speak not only to church life, but home life and work life as well because God is God of it all. Indeed that is why we have Christian schools in the first place. So when Van Dyk (personal communication, 2007) says that with teacher collaboration come opportunities to bring the concept of spiritual community to a larger, practical level, he has likely listed the single most important reason for Christian high schools to encourage and expect their teachers to collaborate. For although teachers collaborating together has resulted in many good things, *Christian* teachers ought to collaborate, not first of all because of the positive results, but rather because it is in tune with a foundational principle on which they stand: namely living and working in community with one another as we serve the Lord.

High schools that have successfully implemented a collaborative ethos among teachers have done so by setting up structures that promote it. Providing teachers with a common space, a common time, and common work have proven to be effective (Shank, 2005). Providing teams with clear objectives and guidelines is also helpful in making collaboration meaningful and allowing participants to see positive results (Van Dyk, 2007; Johnston et al., 2007). An effective way to keep groups on task and discussions meaningful is training teachers to use certain techniques, such as storytelling (Van Dyk, 2007; Shank, 2006), or to use a certain protocol, such as gathering specific data and

answering specific questions (Johnston et al., 2007). Christian high schools would do well to learn from these situations.

Collaboration among teachers is something that should happen in Christian high schools. How can it happen? Teaching has been done in isolation for so many years. Teachers are not going to collaborate just because someone tells them to. They are going to have to be convinced that it is a good idea. Scheduling staff development time in order to learn about collaboration is a good place to start. Such time could be spent emphasizing why teachers in Christian high schools should collaborate, cultivating an attitude necessary to promote healthy collaboration, and training teachers how to collaborate. Perhaps an expert in the field could be called upon to facilitate such a process.

Once teachers have been convinced that collaboration is worth some time and effort and after having been trained in the attitudes and ways of collaboration, administrative leadership needs to encourage it and make time and space for it to happen. Encouraging teachers to reflect on what they do and why they do it would be a good place to start. In *The Maplewood Story* (Van Dyk, 2007) CRAGs were formed after teachers had been encouraged to engage in different types of reflection and were given some tools with which to facilitate their discussions. Many of them became "reflective practitioners" (261), continually looking at what they do and evaluating it in light of basic foundational principles (i.e. – the belief that we are to live and work in community with one another).

In addition to encouraging teachers to meet on their own, adjusting the schedule to allow teachers to meet during the school day has worked for other high schools (Shank, 2005; Johnston et al., 2007) and would be prudent for Christian high schools to do as

well. This will require making changes that won't necessarily be easy to make considering that teaching has been such an individual enterprise in the past. Most teachers are used to having their own room and doing their own thing. Changing this won't be an easy task. Leadership will need to give its full support or chances of success diminish greatly (Van Dyk, personal communication, 2007; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

Full encouragement and support from leadership coupled with allowing time and providing space for it to happen and letting it be voluntary will contribute to successful attempts at developing an ethos in which collaboration is encouraged and expected among faculty of Christian high schools. Once collaborative teams have been in place for a while and more teachers begin to see the benefits, groups can be formed to accomplish any number of purposes. Collaborative action research groups could research and offer solutions to school-wide problems (Stronks, 1993). Storytelling groups could share authentic stories with each other, creating a space where they can learn from each other's experiences, all the while encouraging each other and helping each other become better teachers (Shank, 2006). Collegial study groups (Stronks, 1993) could be formed to discuss together what they are going to do based on what they just learned at the annual in-service meeting. They would then meet regularly to discuss progress made and problems encountered and encourage each other to stay to the task. The possibilities are endless. Start small, build a firm foundation with willing teachers and supportive leadership, and watch it grow from there.

Limitations

This study is limited by the amount of research available on collaboration in Christian high schools. Although research on collaboration has been gathered from a wide range of sources, research available on collaboration in Christian high schools is virtually non-existent. Further research on this topic might include a quantitative and qualitative analysis of several Christian high schools in order to determine the extent to which collaboration is or isn't happening at each school. Based on the findings, specific recommendations could be made regarding how to proceed in developing a collaborative ethos.

The purpose of this study is to determine if a collaborative culture can be more purposefully promoted among faculty members in Christian high schools. Although public school systems could benefit from this research, the implications of this study are specifically aimed at those involved in Christian secondary education.

This study is also limited in its scope. Collaboration can and does happen in many different ways in the world of education. Not only do teachers collaborate with each other, but also with parents, community members, principals and teachers at other schools. The collaborative classroom is also a topic of great interest. However, this study focuses on collaboration among teachers of the same school, namely a Christian high school. Further research on collaboration might include an in-depth look into one of these other areas and perhaps how the different areas compliment each other.

Implications

If collaboration were to become the norm for Christian high school teachers rather than isolation, Christian high schools would be in a position to show the world what it looks like to live and work in community with each other. Considering the rugged individualism that pervades our society, this would be a refreshingly new way of seeing things.

Teachers will have to change the way they look at teaching. They will have to cultivate attitudes of openness and trust. They will have to be willing to give and receive help, and they will have to learn how to be productive members of a group. Engaging in healthy debate and managing conflict are important parts of this process.

Structures and schedules will need to change. A time and a place will need to be reserved for teachers to meet. Classrooms and office space will need to be shared. Here again this is not the norm. Administrative leadership will need to be patient yet persistent.

Teachers will need to learn how to collaborate. Methods such as storytelling, questioning, metaphors and others will have to be explored and experimented with in order to promote healthy collaboration among teachers.

Moving from isolation to collaboration implies making a paradigm shift – a shift not from the individual to the group, but rather from individualism toward community, communities in which individuals are valued for who they are and what they bring to the group. "Now you are the body of Christ and each of you is a part of it" (I Corinthians 12:27). Developing an ethos in which Christian high school teachers are encouraged and expected to collaborate with each other will be no easy task, but the rewards await those who dare take the journey.

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Appendix

Questions used in the interview with Dr. John Van Dyk

1. Based on your experience and what you have learned from your research, what happens when teachers are encouraged and expected to collaborate with each other?

2. Should teachers at Christian high schools be encouraged and expected to collaborate? Why?

3. What can a Christian high school do to promote an ethos of collaboration among its faculty?

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