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**CHANGING TEACHERS, CHANGING TIMES**

Teachers’ Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age

Andy Hargreaves
Chapter 9

Collaboration and Contrived Collegiality
Cup of Comfort or Poisoned Chalice?

If one of the most prominent heresies of educational change is the culture of individualism, then collaboration and collegiality are pivotal to the orthodoxies of change. Collaboration and collegiality have been presented as having many virtues. They have, for instance, been advanced as particularly fruitful strategies for fostering teacher development. Collaboration and collegiality, it is argued, take teacher development beyond personal, idiosyncratic reflection, or dependence on outside experts, to a point where teachers can learn from each other, sharing and developing their expertise together. Research evidence also suggests that the confidence that comes with collegial sharing and support leads to greater readiness to experiment and take risks, and with it a commitment to continuous improvement among teachers as a recognized part of their professional obligation. In this sense, collaboration and collegiality are seen as forming vital bridges between school improvement and teacher development. Certainly, those aspects of collaboration and collegiality that take the form of shared decision-making and staff consultation are among the process factors which are repeatedly identified as correlating with positive school outcomes in studies of school effectiveness.

If collaboration and collegiality are seen as promoting professional growth and internally generated school improvement, they are also widely viewed as ways of securing effective implementation of externally introduced change. Their contribution to the implementation of centralized curriculum reform is a key factor here.

Where curriculum reform is school-based, the case for and contribution of collaboration and collegiality are relatively straightforward. The creation of productive and supportive collegial relationships among teachers has long been seen as a prerequisite for effective school-based curriculum development. In many respects, collaboration and collegiality bring teacher development and curriculum development together. Indeed, the failure of many school-based curriculum development initiatives is attributable, at least in part, to the failure to build and sustain the collegial working relationships essential to their success.

Many writers have argued that the effective implementation of more centralized curricular reforms also depends on the development of collegial relationships and joint planning among each school’s teaching staff; allowing central guidelines to be interpreted and adapted to the context of each particular school; and building commitment and understanding among the teachers responsible for implementing the newly devised curricula. With trends in many systems towards school-based management or local management of schools, the collective responsibility of teachers to implement centrally defined curriculum mandates places even greater reliance on the development of collaboration and collegiality at school level.

Although not quite a cure-all, the claimed benefits of collaboration and collegiality for organizational health and effectiveness therefore appear to be both numerous and widespread. Shulman brings together some of the key arguments when he says:

Teacher collegiality and collaboration are not merely important for the improvement of morale and teacher satisfaction . . . but are absolutely necessary if we wish teaching to be of the highest order. . . . Collegiality and collaboration are also needed to ensure that teachers benefit from their experiences and continue to grow during their careers.

These developments, continues Shulman, have important implications for school leadership. In the wake of the “second wave” of educational reforms in the United States, inspired by the reports of the Holmes Group and the Carnegie Foundation, images of leadership have come to prominence where teachers are involved in and exercise substantial leadership at school level. Shulman summarizes the position thus:

Schools are asked to become like our best corporations, employing modern methods of management to decentralize authority, to make important decisions at the point where the street-level bureaucrats reside. Leadership is not monopolized by administrators, but is shared with teachers.

It is in accordance with these kinds of arguments that we have seen increased advocacy for new styles of leadership that have been described variously as instructional leadership, transformational leadership and shared governance. In all these conceptions, the sharing of decision-making on collegial lines figures very prominently.

Collaboration and collegiality, then, form significant planks of policies to restructure schools from without and to improve them from within. Much of the burden of educational reform has been placed upon their fragile shoulders. School improvement, curriculum reform, teacher development and leadership development are all seen to some extent as dependent on the building of positive collegial relationships for their success. Consequently, while collaboration and collegiality are not themselves usually the subject of national, state or provincial mandates, their successful development is viewed as essential to the effective delivery of reforms that are mandated at national or local levels. Among many
reformers and administrators, collaboration and collegiality have become the keys to educational change.

**CRITIQUES OF COLLEGIALITY**

Collaboration and collegiality may have become important focal points for a growing administrative and intellectual consensus about desirable directions for change and improvement, but they have not been without their critics.

Most critiques of collaboration and collegiality have focused on difficulties of implementation, particularly issues of time during which teachers can work together and issues concerning the unfamiliarity that many teachers have with the collegial role. These criticisms are of a relatively specific, technical, managerial nature.

A second set of critiques of collaboration and collegiality concerns their meaning. Collaboration and collegiality are often discussed as if they are widely understood. In practice, though, what passes for collaboration and collegiality takes many different forms. In terms of specific initiatives alone, collaboration and collegiality can take the form of team teaching, collaborative planning, peer coaching, mentor relationships, professional dialogue and collaborative action research, to name but a few. More informally, they can be expressed through staffroom talk, conversation outside the classroom, help and advice regarding resources and scores of other small but significant actions. Beyond teachers working or talking together in some way, there is little else that these many different activities and initiatives have in common.

Judith Warren Little has helpfully distinguished between different kinds of collegial relations in terms of their implications for teacher independence. Telling stories, "scanning" for ideas and resources, giving and receiving aid and assistance and sharing ideas and materials, she says, do not pose serious threats to teacher independence, since all these forms of collaboration and collegiality take place outside the classroom and leave teachers' conceptions of and control over their own practice broadly intact. Joint work, however, requires closer interdependence between teachers and their colleagues: more mutual adjustments at the level of practice. In the sense that all these things involve teachers working together, they are all versions of collaboration and collegiality. But beyond that simple commonality, these activities are quite different and have quite different implications for teacher autonomy and empowerment.

What matters is not that there are many different kinds of collaboration and collegiality but that the characteristics and virtues of some kinds of collaboration and collegiality are often falsely attributed to other kinds as well, or perhaps to collaboration and collegiality in general. Teacher empowerment, critical reflection or commitment to continuous improvement are claims that are commonly made for collaboration and collegiality in general, but in practice they apply only to particular versions of it.

Because there are so many faces of collaboration and collegiality, their professed attractions as a whole should be treated with caution. There is no such thing as "real" or "true" collaboration or collegiality. There are only different forms of collaboration and collegiality that have different consequences and serve different purposes. Moreover, those forms which are most compatible with the widely declared benefits of teacher empowerment and reflective practice are the forms that seem least common. Little's review of collegial practices found, for instance, that joint work at the level of classroom practice was a comparative rarity. And in the preparation time study on which this chapter is based, even in a group of schools committed to developing collaborative planning among their teachers, this planning was mainly restricted to the specific and relatively short-term task of developing new units of work, and rarely extended to critical, collective and reflective reviews about the ethics, principles and purposes of current practice. This finding is replicated by Little and by Leithwood and Jantzi, who found little evidence of critical feedback about teaching among teachers in schools that might otherwise be considered "collaborative". In our headlong rush to manage collaboration and collegiality, it therefore seems important that we first take time to understand its meaning.

These questions about the meaning of collaboration and collegiality lead, inexorably, to questions about who guides and controls collaboration and collegiality: about their micropolitics. As Cooper puts it in a biting critique of popular conceptions of collaboration and collegiality:

Whose culture is it anyway? If teachers are told what to be professional about, how, where and with whom to collaborate, and what blueprint of professional conduct to follow, then the culture that evolves will be foreign to the setting. They will once again have "received" a culture.

Discussions about and advocacy of collaboration and collegiality have largely taken place within a particular perspective on human relationships: the cultural perspective. In the main, this cultural perspective has been grounded in traditions of sociological functionalism, social anthropology and corporate management. It is a perspective that emphasizes what is shared and held in common in human relationships — values, habits, norms and beliefs: the shared content of teacher cultures. This perspective is pervasive in literature on staff cultures in schools and school systems.

There are two problems with this perspective. First, the existence of shared culture is presumed in any organization being studied, no matter how complex and differentiated. All organizations, it is thought, have cultures. This is not a finding but a presumption. The possibility that some highly complex organizations may have no shared culture of any substance or significance is not acknowledged.

Second, the theoretical and methodological emphasis on what is shared in
expressed it, sculptors may often want to see each other sculpt, talk about sculpting with fellow artists and go to exhibitions of their work, but would never sculpt with a colleague on the same piece of marble. Because of frequent differences in beliefs and approach, teachers, he says, may be no different from sculptors in this respect.

Second, the micropolitical perspective raises questions about the rights of the individual and the protection of individuality in the face of group pressure. Norms of collegiality are sometimes treated as if they were administrative laws of collegiality. Teachers who prefer to continue working alone for all or part of the time can be unfairly ostracized. As I argued in the previous chapter, some teachers plan better in solitude than they do with their colleagues. The protection of their individuality, and their discretion of judgment, is also a protection of their right to disagree and reflect critically on the value and worth of what it is they are being asked to collaborate about. The micropolitical perspective raises questions about the implications of collaboration and collegiality for individuality and solitude.

Third, the micropolitical perspective inquires into the circumstances where collaboration becomes cooptation: as in collaboration with the enemy. It asks where collaboration becomes a commitment not to developing and realizing purposes of one's own but to implementing purposes devised by others. Hartley, for instance, has criticized the tendency towards shorter, school-based, experiential forms of inservice education for teachers on the grounds that they are co-operative because they cultivate emotional commitment to externally mandated changes at the expense of rational deliberation and critique about their worth and applicability.

Fourth, the micropolitical perspective encourages us to discriminate between the different forms that collaboration and collegiality take; to examine who constitutes those different forms and to ask whose interests they serve in each case. In Chapter 4, for instance, I described how some spontaneous and unpredictable forms of collaboration that are steered by the cultural dynamics of students' own families, communities and peer-groups are often redefined through and reinscribed in more bureaucratically contrived and administratively controlled systems of cooperation, such as active learning and cooperative learning. These reforms maintain a focus on developing and supporting cooperation in the classroom but, in doing so, they pass the locus of control over cooperation from the student to the teacher and the community to the school, draining that cooperation of much of its richness, spontaneity and unpredictability.

The micropolitical perspective sensitize us to the possible existence of similar processes in the construction of collaboration and collegiality among teachers: the substitution of more evolutionary and spontaneous forms of teacher collaboration by administratively controlled, safely simulated forms of collegiality. It is this kind of administratively constructed or contrived collegiality that I want to explore in this chapter. I want to do this by drawing a pivotal distinction between collaborative culture and what I call contrived...
collegiality as two prominent but very different forms of collaborative and collegial teacher cultures that can be found in teachers' work: a distinction that turns on the kinds of administrative control and intervention that are exercised in each case.

COLLABORATIVE CULTURES

In collaborative cultures, collaborative working relationships between teachers and their colleagues tend to be:

- **Spontaneous**. They emerge primarily from the teachers themselves as a social group. They may be administratively supported and facilitated by helpful scheduling arrangements, by principals and headteachers offering to cover classes, or by example in the behavior of educational leaders. In this sense, the spontaneity of collaborative cultures is not absolute nor are such cultures free from administrative contrivance of a facilitative nature. But ultimately, collaborative working relationships evolve from and are sustained through the teaching community itself.

- **Voluntary**. Collaborative work relations arise not from administrative constraint or compulsion but from their perceived value among teachers that derives from experience, inclination or non-coercive persuasion that working together is both enjoyable and productive.

- **Development-oriented**. In collaborative cultures, teachers work together primarily to develop initiatives of their own, or to work on externally supported or mandated initiatives to which they themselves have a commitment. In collaborative cultures, teachers most often establish the tasks and purposes for working together, rather than meet to implement the purposes of others. Teachers, here, are people who initiate change as much as or more than they react to it. When they have to respond to external mandates, they do so selectively, drawing on their professional confidence and discretionary judgment as a community.50

- **Pervasive across time and space**. In collaborative cultures, working together is not often a scheduled activity (like a regular planning session) that can be administratively fixed as taking place at a designated time in a designated place. Scheduled meetings and planning sessions may form part of collaborative cultures but they do not dominate the arrangements for working together. In collaborative cultures, much of the way teachers work together is in almost unnoticed, brief yet frequent informal encounters. This may take the form of such things as passing words and glances, praises and thanks, offers to exchange classes in tough times, suggestions about new ideas, informal discussions about new units of work, sharing of problems or meeting parents together. Collaboration cultures are, in this sense, not clearly or closely regulated. They are constitutive of the very way that the teacher’s working life operates in the school.

- **Unpredictable**. Because, in collaborative cultures, teachers have discretion and control over what will be developed, the outcomes of collaboration are often uncertain and not easily predicted. In implementation-oriented systems, where most decisions about purpose and program are centralized at the school district or provincial/state/national level, this can be administratively perplexing. In general, therefore, collaborative cultures are incompatible with school systems where decisions about curriculum and evaluation are highly centralized. The difficulty for administrators seeking to help develop collaborative cultures may therefore be a difficulty not so much of human relations but of political control.

One of the schools in the preparation time study illustrated vividly how collaborative cultures rest on relationships that extend persistently and pervasively across the whole school. The principal of this school, in a small rural, dormitory community, recognized the incipient dangers of balkanization, of teachers becoming divided into separate, isolated groups, even within the context of this smaller elementary school.

Teachers can get kind of isolated. They say, “I’m a primary teacher, a junior teacher, an intermediate teacher!” And the primary teachers are afraid of the older kids, and the intermediate teachers are afraid of the little kids.

He felt that irrespective of grade differences:

You all have a bank of strategies to use with kids, and you should all have the same types of practice, the same types of expectations in the personal things, and so on. You’ve just got different-aged kids.

He worked hard to get teachers to work together with children from different grades on common projects, but also appreciated this would be threatening for them: a major challenge to their identity and security.

If I were to mention to my Grade 1 teacher, “Would you go up and cover the Grade 8 science class?”; well, she’d rather go and drive her car into a tree than confront that. And she’d taught them all in Grade 1!
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Working with mixed-aged groups alleviated these threats, though, and helped create a stronger sense of the school as one community. The words of one teacher testify to the success of these and other strategies deployed by the principal in his attempts to create a sense of unity. He reflected, in particular, on a recent experience of being involved in the cooperative planning of a whole-school focus on "Olympics".

That was very involved. We ran a special sports day outside and we went to the arena ... and we had a Calgary [site of the winter Olympics] day at school, and we had pancakes. We had it written up in the paper and everything. It was really quite a job. We certainly learned a lot about planning, ourselves, and I think we felt pretty proud, because some schools did nothing or very little, and we were involved with it. Of course, I'm biased, but I think the school atmosphere here benefits from the kind of family atmosphere we have ... We do things together. There's a lot of junior/primary/senior togetherness in that respect and I don't see such clearcut rivalries between seniors and juniors, and juniors and primaries ... I think it's because of staff unity and the way the principal sees the school as a unit, not as separate little divisions.

The modest and unassuming principal of this school modeled what he most expected of his staff. He praised them, sent them notes to thank them, was always visible around the school to see and hear them, and often bought them corsages or other little gifts to show how much he valued them. When teachers needed his advice, he willingly offered it. When he himself needed help, he unashamedly asked for it. And when teachers wanted to spend their preparation times planning together, he fixed the schedule to facilitate it. He promoted rituals and ceremonies (like an Olympic torch-bearing ceremony) to bring the school and the community together. He encouraged experiments in cross-grade groupings of students and links between their teachers to bring teachers together. And he himself sometimes taught classes to show the importance of bringing the principal and the students together. In response, as the teachers' remarks earlier indicate, teachers broke down the barriers, worked closely together and learned a lot from each other. They didn't just collaborate on things initiated from the outside, but also on projects they developed themselves — as when the teacher taking a course on the use of computers secured some release time from the principal to work with a colleague already knowledgeable about computers, so they could develop some classroom software together.

This is just one example of what a collaborative teacher culture is like in action, and of the kinds of leadership that help promote and support it. This is not to say that collaborative cultures are without their problems or limitations. As I have argued elsewhere, collaborative cultures can be bounded or restricted in nature with teachers focusing on rather safer activities of sharing resources, materials and ideas, or on planning units of study together in a rather workaday fashion, without reflecting on the value, purpose and consequences of what they do, or without challenging each others' practices, perspectives and assumptions. Collaborative cultures can, in these instances, degenerate into comfortable and complacent cultures. Collegiality can be reduced to congeniality.

But in their most rigorous, robust (and somewhat rarer) forms, collaborative cultures can extend into joint work, mutual observation, and focused reflective inquiry in ways that extend practice critically, searching for better alternatives in the continuous quest for improvement. In these cases, collaborative cultures are not cozy, complacent and politically quiescent. Rather, they can build collective strength and confidence in communities of teachers who are able to interact knowledgeably and assertively with the bearers of innovation and reform; able and willing to select which innovations to adopt, which ones to adapt, and which ones to resist or ignore, as best befits their purposes and circumstances.

CONTRIVED COLLEGIALLY

In conditions of contrived collegiality, teachers' collaborative working relationships are not spontaneous, voluntary, development-oriented, fixed in time and space and predictable. The comparative, combined features of contrived collegiality, are as follows:

- Administratively regulated. Contrived collegiality does not evolve spontaneously from the initiative of teachers, but is an administrative imposition that requires teachers to meet and work together.
- Compulsory. Contrived collegiality therefore makes working together a matter of compulsion as in mandatory peer coaching, team teaching and collaborative planning arrangements. Contrived collegiality affords little discretion to individuality or solitude. Compulsion may be direct, or it may be indirect in terms of associated promises of promotion or veiled threats of withdrawal of support for teachers' other favoured projects, for example.
- Implementation-oriented. Under conditions of contrived collegiality, teachers are required or "persuaded" to work together to implement the mandates of others — most directly those of the principal, or headteacher, or indirectly those of the school district or the Ministry. Such mandates may take the form of a national curriculum, accelerated learning programs, or cooperative learning strategies, for example. Here, collegial cooperation is closely bound up with administrative cooption.
Fixed in time and space. Contrived collegiality takes place in particular places at particular times. This is part of its administrative regulation. When, for example, peer coaching sessions, collaborative planning meetings in preparation time, and mentor meetings alone constitute teachers’ joint working relationships, they amount to trying to secure cooperation by contrivance.

Predictable. Contrived collegiality is designed to have relatively high predictability in its outcomes. This cannot, of course, be guaranteed and, as we shall see, the outcomes of contrived collegiality are sometimes perverse. But control over its purposes and regulation of its time and placement are designed to increase the predictability of teacher collegiality and its outcomes. Contrived collegiality in these respects a safe administrative simulation of collaboration. It replaces spontaneous, unpredictable and difficult-to-control forms of teacher-generated collaboration with forms of collaboration that are captured, contained and contrived by administrators instead.

CONTRIVED COLLEGIALITY IN ACTION

I now want to explore some practical, school-based realizations of contrived collegiality that emerged in the preparation time study, particularly in the school board dedicated to developing collaborative planning in a group of its schools. As I have already described, we found some clear and distinctive examples of collaborative cultures within these schools, but contrived collegiality was also clearly present. What follows is not an evaluation of the collaborative planning initiative overall. Nor is it an attempt to estimate in quantitative terms, the strength of contrived collegiality within that initiative. Rather, it is designed to draw attention, from a micropolitical perspective, to aspects of collegiality emerging from the data that have received little or no emphasis thus far in more general, positively inclined discussions of teacher collaboration.

I will focus on three specific realizations of contrived collegiality that emerged from the study and that illustrate both the properties and the consequences of this pattern of teacher collaboration. These realizations of contrived collegiality are mandated preparation time use, consultation with special education resource teachers, and peer coaching.

1. Mandated Preparation Time Use

In debates surrounding the introduction of preparation time in many Ontario school boards, one of the arguments used in its support was that it would enable teachers to meet and consult with their colleagues during the school day. For most teachers we interviewed, preparation time or “planning time” was not at all the best time to plan, however. Preparation time periods were usually fairly short: 40 minutes or less. Many minutes were often lost looking after classes until the next teacher arrived, taking children to the gym for their physical education class with another teacher and supervising them getting changed before that, walking across to the staffroom or library if the teacher’s own classroom was in use, and other activities. Three teachers’ comments illustrate their concerns here:

You could get more accomplished in an hour. I’m very conscious of — well, now, I can only really do this job and that job, and then I have to get back. And even as it is, when I try to pick up the kids after music, I miss them, because I’ve just been that two minutes later running off that little extra job, and they’re gone, they’re back into the classroom and I’ve got to retrace my steps and catch up with them. I would use it [the prep time] differently if I had a larger amount.

Usually, I find my preps go fast, there’s only 35 minutes and when you’re dismissing your class and going back into your class and moving all around, suddenly that 35 minutes is now 25 minutes and before you know it, if you have to go to the office to do some photocopying, or to the work area to run off dittos, that 25 minutes is now gone. It takes time to get to these places.

[One 40 minute prep time] doesn’t end up being the full time, because my class has to come in from recess, get their coats off. [The covering teacher] has to get his class to French. So right now I would say it’s just a good half hour. Then once the bad weather starts, it will be less than that. The kids have to get their snowsuits off. But it’s scheduled as the full 40 minutes.

Not surprisingly, therefore, teachers commonly regarded preparation time as too short for sustained planning, be it collective or individual. Indeed, so scarce and pressed was the time that teachers frequently commented they needed to do their planning before prep time, at home perhaps, so they knew exactly how the time was going to be used and what jobs they were going to do at that time. Teachers here preferred to plan at other times: at lunch, before school and after school, for instance. Preparation time, rather, was used more to “clear the decks” of the innumerable small tasks like photocopying and telephoning that could be dispatched less efficiently at other times like lunch, when the rest of the school’s teachers would be clamoring for the same resources. This pattern of work in preparation time was highly useful for many teachers and freed up time for them to plan in a more sustained way at other points in the school day.

Usually [in prep time], I have a hundred things to do, and I only get ten of them done. I mark work, I prepare for the next day, I
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do bulletin boards, I write letters to parents, I phone parents: a multitude of things.

[With one particular teacher-librarian] we would tend to do our preparation with him after school. My team partner and I couldn’t get sprung [scheduled] together, so we would choose to go after school and work with our librarian. That’s when we really could plan, because the air was clear and we really tossed ideas back and forth.

Marking, doing stencils, photocopying, cutting and pasting, and doing bulletin boards were the usual stuff of preparation time for most teachers.

Larger preparation time periods (doubles) were more suited to extended planning, either alone or with colleagues. A number of teachers preferred some of their time to be “chunked” in this way to facilitate planning. But when these extended preparation time periods were designed specifically for collaborating with colleagues, teachers were still concerned to have scheduled time to prepare for their own classes.

For other teachers, however, preparation time was ideal for planning with colleagues. Responsibilities for coaching and refereeing sports teams, for instance, gave some teachers little opportunity to meet with colleagues at other times. For a number of women teachers, in particular a single parent with a child who often had to be taken to psychiatric appointments immediately after school, pressing domestic responsibilities made it difficult for them to stay long with colleagues after school. Much of their planning took place at home, often late at night. For them, preparation time was a good time to work with colleagues.

Teachers’ work and life circumstances vary. The teachers’ work is highly contexted. It is not and cannot be standardized in the way that administrators sometimes want it to be. Preparation time and its uses therefore have an inevitably complicated and highly contexted relationship to these variable work and life circumstances. There is no unambiguous administrative formula for dealing with this. It would be of little value to calculate how many teachers in one school would support and benefit from scheduled collaborative planning time and how many would not and then decide, on some percentage basis, whether mandating such uses for preparation time would be worthwhile. The important administrative principle, rather, would appear to be one of administrative flexibility and discretion in delegating decisions about how preparation time periods are to be used to teachers themselves.

That flexibility is important for at least three reasons: to place preparation time use in the realistic context of teachers’ wider life and work circumstances; to allow preparation time use to be responsive to the day-to-day, week-to-week variations in required tasks and priorities; and, not least, to acknowledge the professionalism of teachers as defined by Schon in terms of their rights and opportunities to exercise discretionary judgment in the best interests of those students for whom they care and hold responsibility.

Some interview responses from teachers indicated that while they would normally use preparation periods for the collaborative purposes designated by the principal, a proportion of them would retreat to their own room or other space, to work alone for their own classes, clearing away the plethora of little tasks for which preparation time is so important. Yet in doing so, they would feel guilty, aware that they were going against the wishes of their principal.

In a school where grade partners were scheduled to plan together, one teacher related how, every third week, he and his grade partners would work alone instead.

T: We plan in blocks of months, so our theme works that way, so that as we get to the third week, we’ll say to each other, “Now, we know what we’re doing next week; these are some of the things that we have to get caught up because we’re behind in this.” And we’ll say, “Bye”, and each go our separate way.

I: And would the view about that be that it was OK to do that, if it were known that that’s what you did?

T: I don’t think so. I think when they make this as a statement that you’re working together as a group, and that’s the impression I get, that you’re to work together as a group for that 40 minutes.

One principal related how he discovered that teachers whose classes he had personally covered so they could be released to plan together were, on the occasion he checked up on them, not planning together at all, but working, preparing and marking alone.

I used to take the kids myself and do different things with them. . . . I thought the teachers were getting together, planning . . . and I thought, “Oh well, I’ll ask somebody to watch the kids while I go and see what’s going on in the planning.” I walked down the hall and three teachers were all in different rooms, marking. So I said, “Whoo! There’s something wrong here.” But you know, they always have a rationalization: “Well we got to the point where we needed to do this! Trust us! We will get together on our own time to do the planning.”

Infuriating as it might seem to administrators, especially when they have given up their own precious time to facilitate collaborative planning, it is important, for the reasons reviewed earlier, to allow discretion and flexibility for teachers in their use of preparation time at any particular moment. It is, of course, helpful to use scheduling in order to release teachers together, as a device, or contrivance to facilitate collaboration and collegiality, not to control it. Difficult as it may sometimes be for them, it is important for principals or
headteachers to continue giving their time to covering for teachers so they can be released, even though teachers may not always use that released time to work together, as expected. I am not suggesting here that administrators abrogate their responsibility for fulfilling the school's purposes and priorities. But it is important, for reasons of sheer practicality and of respect for teachers' professionalism, that teachers are awarded high discretion and flexibility in how those priorities are met. With regard to collaborative planning, principals might do better to set expectations for the task (preferably through discussion and development with teachers), rather than expectations for the time. What teachers would then be held accountable for would be commitment to and completion of the task, not obedience in their use of the time.

2. Consultation with Special Education Resource Teachers

A second manifestation of contrived collegiality can be seen in the arrangements for consultation between special education teachers and classroom teachers. Since the early 1980s in Ontario, there has been a shift in the expected role for special education teachers in ordinary schools. With the integration of more special education students into regular classes, the special education teacher's role has been undergoing a shift from a restorative role, where identified children would be withdrawn from classes, "treated" by the special education teacher and then "restored" to regular class work at a later stage, to an integrative role, where the special education resource teacher supports the regular teacher in adapting instruction for identified children within normal classroom work.31 One implication for this development has been a need for closer consultation between special education teachers and regular classroom teachers to monitor and create programs for identified children in regular classes. In schools within the collaboratively inclined board in the study, preparation time was often used or scheduled to facilitate this process of consultation with special education resource teachers (SERTS).

In many cases, these consultations were not just expected or administratively facilitated, but directly mandated to occur in particular places at particular times. These required consultations between classroom teachers and special education resource teachers raised issues that were similar to those entailed in required consultations between grade partners in preparation time. Flexibility in use of time was again deemed important by teachers. Teachers perceived special education support from the resource teacher as necessary, important and valuable, although the intensity of that need and the depth of support required varied with the program, the changing nature of students' difficulties and needs, and other factors. Yet setting aside time each week when the teacher was required to meet with resource staff was seen by many as helpfully inflexible, as unresponsive to the changing needs of the students, the program, the teacher and the classroom. Many teachers emphasized the importance of meeting with special education staff when there was a need to meet, a purpose for the meeting (which might be and often was outside preparation time just as much as within it). Sometimes, however, they would find that on meeting the resource teacher, there was no business to discuss that week, and once again they would tacitly agree to go their own ways and work alone, without informing the principal.

An example from the study illustrates what is at stake here. In it, a teacher describes how he is scheduled to meet with the SERT on a week but how, once every three weeks, he and the SERT do not stick to that arrangement. The principal, he surmises, would not approve of this.

T: We sit down and we look at what is being done, what has to be caught up in the threads for the following week, and we say: "Well, this is where we want to go for the following, after that, and that next week we’ll come with the ideas for that period to start off the next one." She goes her way, we go ours and we do planning together at that time.

I: So you actually use it for a different purpose than it’s been assigned for?

T: That’s right.

I: Does anyone mind?

T: I think the principal would if he found out, but I mean it’s the only way we can work it out. Sitting there for half an hour looking at each other and smiling is not going to accomplish anything.

In a second example, a teacher describes how she and her colleagues managed to persuade a SERT to meet them not in scheduled prep time, but at other times, more flexibly, with the result that prep times ("my three prep times", as she calls them) are preserved for her own priorities of individual classroom-centred work.

T: Last year, she [the SERT] wanted one of our prep times each cycle, one in three, to talk about children that she had from my room that she was working with; children with problems. I wasn’t too happy with that. Neither were the others. I felt that it was too long a time. She didn’t need 40 minutes.

I: Has that actually worked out in practice for you — because you’ve had some experience of doing it? Is it your experience that it is too long?

T: I didn’t need 40 minutes. Actually this year it has changed. She was new to the school, and she wanted more time to talk to us. This was for each teacher that she saw. She wanted to see us for 40 minutes each cycle. . . . But this year, she’s cut that down. We’ve chosen our own time now,
when we like to see her. So I usually see her on my lunch hour. And I find that's better, because I can eat my lunch at the same time, and I still have my three prep times.

For some teachers, however, preparation time was actually the most helpful and convenient time to meet with the SERT. One teacher who preferred this arrangement and indeed actively initiated it was a teacher with heavy coaching and sports responsibilities at lunch and after school.

T: I use [one prep period] to talk to ... the Special Education person about the progress of the three kids that we're monitoring in my class. We keep updates on that, on what she's doing and what I'm expecting and so on. So that's our little chat time.

I: So you usually use a prep period to do that, do you?

T: Yes, that's my prep period [emphasis added]. I chose that myself. Some teachers use after school, or mornings. I chose that period mostly because, well, in the Fall, I was so busy with the school team. Either I was on the road with away games, or practising. It was very hard for me to see her after school.

Judging from their accounts of how they consulted with special education teachers, regular teachers, as a group, seem a rather contrary bunch! Teachers who have scheduled time to meet with their SERTS may prefer to do so at other times. Other teachers may initiate consultation arrangements of their own in prep time. And one teacher regretted that special education teachers were not available for consultation during prep time in her school, so that she had to meet with them in short snatches "on the fly" instead. This apparent perversity does not necessarily reveal inconsistency, or any proclivity to oppose whatever arrangements are available. Rather, these comments point once more to the heavily contextual nature of teachers' work, and the difficulty that standardized administrative procedures for developing collegiality have in accommodating these particular and shifting circumstances of teaching.

Two other factors compounded this relationship between classroom teachers, special education resource staff and the use of preparation time. These were expertise and control.

Expertise is an important criterion for collaboration among teachers. Sharing as such is not itself usually enough. This general principle also applies to relationships between classroom teachers and special education resource staff in particular. Acknowledgement of complementary expertise on the part of the special education resource staff is important. Where classroom teachers have previous special education expertise, or where, as is increasingly common among Ontario elementary teachers, they possess special education qualifications to as advanced a level as the resource personnel themselves, then meetings with resource staff can seem unnecessary. To teachers in this position, regular scheduled consultations with the special education resource teacher can sometimes appear to contribute little to their existing expertise and understanding. Because of this, teachers and resource staff again sometimes tacitly agreed not to meet on a regular basis, but only as required. One of the teachers put it this way:

One of them [the prep times] gives me time with the Special Ed. person, although I haven't had a need of that this year. In fact, I released her from it until she needed, or we felt a need.

She went on to explain that this was partly because, at present, she had very few "children with problems" in her class. "But also", she continued,

I find having had some Special Education training ... I don't have a need for the resources as much. In other words, I am my own resource ... I think I have enough expertise and resources within myself.

In relations between classroom teachers and special education resource staff, concerns about expertise are, however, also often closely bound up with concerns about ownership and control. From the accounts of teachers interviewed in the study, it seemed that as the special education resource teacher's role had expanded and become more preventive in nature, there had, in some cases, been something of a struggle with classroom teachers about who had "ownership" of the "mainstreamed" students. Several instances were reported of initial "personality" clashes with the special education teacher, or of special education staff allegedly trying to "dictate" to ordinary staff what actions to take with students. In one case, resistance to the special education teacher's advice, or inability to implement it, led to an ultimate agreement for that teacher to work in class with the children themselves, instead of advising the teacher how to do it. In other cases, the special education teacher left, to be replaced by one who was more "congenial". And there were claims that in the remaining cases, while the relationship had been initially problematic, over time it had been negotiated successfully, so that the parties came to agree on the distribution of expertise, on the balance of ownership, and on a desirable future pattern for the relationship.

Complaints about what has been termed contrived collegiality may sometimes therefore have been motivated less by concerns about rigidity of scheduling and redundancy of expertise than by desires to maintain control over students and their programming without interference from "outsiders", whatever their expertise. Under these circumstances, administrative contrivance may have been necessary just to get a relationship started in which a wider brief for special education support could begin, whatever the initial difficulties. Sometimes, existing structures can obstruct the emergence of vibrant teacher cultures. All cultures are grounded in structures of some kind and if the structures are overwhelmingly obstructive, they may need to be modified to allow better cultures to grow. But even if this need for some measure of initial contrivance
is acknowledged, the early implementation problems in developing these new relationships could still almost certainly have been eased by reducing some of the other aspects of contrived collegiality (in terms of rigid scheduling of meeting times, etc.).

What implications might be drawn here? First, more sensitivity to classroom teachers’ existing expertise in special education might be encouraged. In fact, this principle of acknowledging existing expertise among one’s colleagues might also apply to those who find themselves in a position of teacher leadership more generally. Second, even where the expertise in special education is strong among SERTS and particular teachers with whom they consult, there is still a case for colleagues sharing views on special education students and their programming. But this sharing should not be construed as sharing among the skilled and less skilled, the expert and the novice, but among communities of professional equals committed to continuous improvement. Third, expectations for consultation about special education students should perhaps once more be set for the task rather than the time, creating greater flexibility and discretion regarding how and when teachers meet.

3. Peer Coaching
A third area of practice in which elements of contrived collegiality were revealed is peer coaching. While definitions and interpretations of peer coaching vary, it normally consists of a structured process for teachers to work together, usually in pairs, to improve practice. In one of the best-known and earliest elaborations of peer coaching, four discrete stages make up the peer coaching process: presentation of theory underlying a newly advocated approach; demonstration or modeling of that approach; practice of the approach by the teacher new to it; feedback on how the teacher used the new practice. In the field of peer coaching, there are differences and disagreements in terms of whether the process should be voluntary or compulsory, whether it should focus on practical experience or cognitive reflection about that experience, and whether it should be directed to implementing instructional strategies of allegedly “known” effectiveness, or to making improvements in areas of the teacher’s own choosing. Whatever the ideals of any model, though, the muddy realities of practice are often at some variance from those ideas. What is declared as voluntary in principle, for instance, is often perceived as not at all voluntary in practice.

In the sample of teachers in the study, three had recently participated in a new peer coaching program instituted by the board in order to make new initiatives in instruction in the junior division (Grades 4–6). This consisted of six afternoons spent with school board consultants away from the school, with the intention that follow-up activities would be developed and practised with fellow teachers in school. As one teacher described it:

The Ministry did a review of junior grades a few years ago and they were trying to find out what types of program junior

teachers were doing. They found out that there was not enough activity-oriented things going on in the classroom, so the board has put together a little program to try to get teachers stirred up and doing more activity-oriented things. It started last year. They sent one junior (division) teacher from each school last year and I’m the representative this year.

Excellent in its rationale and intent perhaps, this program was perceived very differently at the level of practice than it appeared in its ideal form.

One teacher voiced criticisms about lack of consultation in the choice of coaching partners. Unlike the justification made for arranged marriages, this teacher, it seemed, had not learned to love, like or even work effectively with her selected partner over time. This teacher described the program as a series of workshops, “things you could try”, followed by “a little homework assignment, things to try in the classroom, and then we go back and discuss how it worked”. She went on to say she was “supposed to be working with the person who did it last year”. “Are you?” I asked.

Actually, no I’m not. There’s a bit of a personality problem there, so I don’t know. I think maybe the people chosen to go to these workshops should be a little more carefully selected. That’s my personal feeling.

This teacher further explained that:

When I volunteered, I didn’t realize that I was expected to work with this other person. I’ve since found that out. I don’t know whether the administration knew about it or not. We’ve had a change of principal, as you know, so the person chosen to go last year was chosen by a different person.

She reflected on the involuntary nature of the partnership with which she was faced:

[The partner] manages a classroom completely differently than I do, you know — a whole different way of teaching. It would be stupid for us to try to work together. . . . As well as the personality, there’s the teaching strategies involved.

These practice-based remarks resonate with Huberman’s insights of a more theoretical nature that most teachers are likely to be able to work productively together at the level of classroom practice only if they have broadly compatible educational beliefs and similar approaches to their teaching. Where these beliefs and approaches are not broadly shared, contrived collegiality in the form of compulsory teaming or coaching is unlikely to be successful.

This first teacher was uncertain whether her teaming with an incompatible colleague was a managerial ploy or an administrative accident. A second teacher
felt that both she and her principal had been fundamentally misled by senior board administrators about the purposes of the program:

We got a report saying how terrible “junior” is and all these things are wrong with junior and I was asked would I like to be part of a group to follow up on this report. And they sent us the report. We read it all, made references. It didn’t have anything to do with the report at all. Not a thing... They didn’t even mention the report... And I thought, it was going to be a follow-up on how can we make the juniors better. But it wasn’t.

What the initiative was, rather, was a set of sessions “laid on” by the board; of things done to teachers rather than developed with them. Junior science, junior language – these types of topics were the focal points of the board sessions.

We were told every week what we were going to do. It isn’t what my principal thought it was going to be either. We both were under the impression that it was going to be junior teachers’ input into how to make the junior division better.

Far from building on and valuing the participating teachers’ insight and expertise, this program seemed to overlook and disregard them.

I didn’t get anything out of it that I didn’t already know... If you’re new to the junior area, I think probably you would have gotten a lot out of it, a lot of good ideas. But having already been in it for 19 years, I felt that it was the wrong way for me to be going. I felt that I was regressing instead of progressing. I would have liked to have some input as to what’s wrong in the junior division and how can we change the junior division.

Not only did this approach seem disrespectful of teachers’ professionalism, of their existing expertise and discretionary judgment, but it was also impractical with regard to teachers being supposed to coach their colleagues in the newly learned methods back in their own schools.

You were supposed to be a coach and implement it back in your own room. But... a lot of the stuff that they’re talking about, we were already doing in our room. I mean, they tell me a lot of people don’t do this. I don’t know how they can get away with not doing it. It’s been board policy for years to plan cooperatively and teach in groups and this stuff... And they tell me people don’t do it. I don’t know how they get away with it.

Such gaps between the ideal plans of administrators and the practical realities of schools were even starker in the case of a third teacher. He described the principles of the coaching element of the program very clearly: “They want to have these people go out, be inserviced, come back, try it in the classroom, share it with the other staff members, let them try it in their classroom...” The practice, however, was rather different.

I: Have you been out in connection with this yourself?
T: No, I haven’t.
I: Do you know when it starts?
T: It should have started a month and a half ago, but for some reason, I guess with so much going on, I just wasn’t aware that I was the one in charge, and that I should have been going to these things!

Perhaps these teachers were unusual. They were only three teachers, after all. But they were not specially selected in the research design. And they did comprise all the teachers in the sample who had been involved in the in-service program. It is temteting to say their experiences were unfortunate or to see their circumstances as special or accidental. Another way of looking at these data, though, is to acknowledge that all circumstances in teaching are special. Incompatible team partners, changing principals and unclear communication about new roles are the stuff of teaching, not isolated interruptions to it.

In these data, this “messiness” seems like a problem. And it mainly seems like a shortcoming of the teachers and the schools in each case. But in many respects, the problem is perhaps more one of centralized, standardized, mandated programs and solutions being imposed insensitively on the specific, variable and rapidly changing settings of teaching. What these responses indicate is not so much the imperfections of practice in general but the way in which contrived collegiality is deeply insensitive to context, to the specifics of the teacher’s classroom situation and to the discretionary judgments that teachers need in order to have the flexibility to exercise there, if they are to be successful. District policies and initiatives can be standardized. Classrooms and schools cannot. A more voluntary, development-oriented model of teacher collaboration could build more effectively on the discretionary judgments that teachers exercise in the varying contexts of their work. Mandated, implementation-oriented forms of contrived collegiality of the kind reviewed here are almost certainly too inflexible for that.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The preparation time study began with an elegantly formulated research question which asked whether newly provided preparation time would bring about the development of collaboration and collegiality among teachers, or whether the use of such time would be absorbed into the existing culture of individualism. Yet the qualitative data generated findings more complex and perhaps
more interesting than the possibilities posed by either of those alternatives. Collegiality emerged in one board, but not in the other. But even in the board where collegiality was present, more important than its occurrence was its meaning.

One of the realizations of teacher collaboration was what I have called contrived collegiality. This reconstituted the cooperative principles of human association among teachers in administratively regulated and predictable forms. In contrived collegiality, collaboration among teachers was compulsory, not voluntary; bounded and fixed in time and space; implementation rather than development-oriented; and meant to be predictable rather than unpredictable in its outcomes.

The realizations and implications of contrived collegiality emerged in three areas of teacher collaboration: mandated collaboration and joint planning in preparation time; required consultation with special education resource teachers at scheduled times; and participation in a peer coaching program. In micropolitical and more broadly sociopolitical terms, contrived collegiality is not merely an example of personal insensitivity, among particular administrators. Rather, it is constitutive of sociopolitical and administrative systems that are less than fully serious about their rhetorical commitment to teacher empowerment. They are systems prepared to delegate to teachers and indeed hold them accountable for the collective, shared responsibility for implementation, while allocating to themselves increasingly centralized responsibility for the development and imposition of purposes through curriculum and assessment mandates. They are systems of state regulation and control in which the business of conception and planning remains broadly separated from that of technical execution. In many respects, and in many instances, humanistic rhetorics of collegiality and empowerment disguise that fundamental division.

Two of the major consequences of contrived collegiality, it was found, are inflexibility and inefficiency — in terms of teachers not meeting when they should, of meeting when there is no business to discuss, and of being involved in peer coaching schemes which they have misunderstood or not been able to work through with suitable partners. In this respect, the sad thing about the safe simulation of teacher collaboration that I have called contrived collegiality is not that it deceives teachers, but that it delays, distracts and demeans them. The inflexibility of mandated collegiality makes it difficult for programs to be adjusted to the purposes and practicalities of particular school and classroom settings. It overrides teachers' professionalism and the discretionary judgment which comprises it. And it diverts teachers' efforts and energies into simulated compliance with administrative demands that are inflexible and inappropriate for the settings in which they work.

Understood in micropolitical and sociopolitical terms, contrived collegiality and its consequences are more than problems of individual insensitivity. More sensitivity and flexibility among school principals and headteachers in the management of collegiality can certainly help alleviate some of its unwanted effects, of course. But the issue underlying contrived collegiality is ultimately one that must be addressed by school systems and educational systems at the highest level. It is an issue of willingness to give to schools and their teachers substantial responsibility for development as well as implementation, for curriculum as well as instruction. It is an issue of commitment to unravelling the details of district, state or nationally driven curriculum guidelines, to give communities of teachers the necessary flexibility to work with each other in developing programs of their own. Ultimately, it is an issue of serious and wide-ranging rather than merely cosmetic empowerment of our teachers and our schools. What remains to be seen, amidst all the rhetoric of restructuring and reform, is whether principals, school system administrators and politicians are prepared to bite that particular bullet.

NOTES


10. Ibid, pp. 6-7.


17. In her widely cited study of elementary teachers’ work relations and their implications for student achievement, for instance, Rosenholtz, op. cit., note 2, makes bold claims for the benefits of teacher collaboration as a whole which are actually founded on a teacher interview instrument that embodies quite specific and rather narrow interpretations of it. Of seven items dealing with collaboration, six refer to giving and receiving advice and help, one to sharing teaching ideas and materials. None deals with critical reflection, shared decision-making, collaborative planning or structured collective reviews and reforms of teaching through such strategies as peer coaching. In fact, Rosenholtz’s criteria of collaboration are very much like the kinds of limited sharing and swapping of stories that Lortie, D., Schoolteacher, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1975, identified as being quite compatible with a basic commitment to individualism and autonomy in the classroom among teachers.

18. Little, op. cit., note 16.


34. Ibid. Critiques of peer coaching that adopt a narrow technical approach include Garmston, R. J., "How administrators support peer coaching", Educational Leadership, 44(1), 1987, 18-26; and Hargreaves, A. and Dawe, R., "Paths of professional development: Contrived collegiality, collaborative culture and the case of peer coaching", Teaching and Teacher Education, 6(3), 1990, 227-41.

