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# Examining Teacher Collaboration in a Kindergarten Building: A Case Study

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EXAMINING TEACHER COLLABORATION IN A  
KINDERGARTEN BUILDING: A CASE STUDY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Interdisciplinary Doctoral Program for Educational Leaders

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Wesley W. Shipley

May 2009

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Wesley W. Shipley

2009

**DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY**  
**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**  
**INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL PROGRAM FOR**  
**EDUCATIONAL LEADERS**

*Dissertation*

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.)

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**March 9, 2009**

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## ABSTRACT

### EXAMINING TEACHER COLLABORATION IN A KINDERGARTEN BUILDING: A CASE STUDY

By

Wesley W. Shipley

May 2009

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. Peter M. Miller

Kindergarten programs have been part of public schooling since the 1850s. Over the years, kindergarten programs have changed from a nurturing, child-centered atmosphere to more academically rigorous programs that aspire to better prepare children for grade school. Additionally, since the launch of Sputnik in 1957, Americans have identified the need for school reform to better prepare their children to compete on a global level. The author of this dissertation views kindergarten programs and school reform to be at a confluence where school reform efforts are attempting to be met by promoting greater teacher collaboration to influence changes in early childhood instructional delivery.

The author examines, through a case study, one Southwestern Pennsylvania school district's response to school reform through the implementation of a flexible kindergarten program that allows for three distinct community options: traditional half-

day kindergarten, full-day kindergarten, and extended-day kindergarten: a specially designed literacy program for students that qualify based on demonstrating a deficiency on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) pre-reading screenings including letter naming and beginning sound identification prior to entry into kindergarten. All kindergarten programs for the entire district are housed in one building and isolated from all other grades. The author investigates how this kindergarten building has implemented collaboration among the teachers for planning and program delivery in an attempt at early childhood school reform while also providing program choice to the community.

Given the current climate regarding school improvement and federally mandated academic targets for student achievement, this researcher hopes to enlighten school decision makers regarding the usefulness of a collaborative kindergarten model to meet the needs of its students while addressing school reform efforts in the state of Pennsylvania.

## DEDICATION

To my wife and children:  
Nancy, Raychel, Olivia and Rebekah Shipley

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my wife, Nancy, for her support and understanding over the last four years - especially for her willingness to pick up the pieces as I forged ahead with a single focus. We were told that marriage is not always fifty-fifty and Nancy has done more than her fair share while she gave me the space and support to make this a priority. I would also like to recognize my daughters: Raychel, Olivia, and Rebekah who have always had a father who was still in school. I cannot begin to express my gratitude for all your love and support. We found a way to balance work, family and the demands of a doctoral program and I'm forever grateful for the sacrifices you all have made so that I could chase this dream.

I am grateful to the teachers, staff and administration at Star Center School District and Middleton Kindergarten School. I appreciate their willingness to participate in my study. Their candor provided me with much insight into their special setting. They are excellent representatives of the field of education and champions for early childhood education

I would like to thank my dissertation committee. Dr. Pete Miller, Dr. Jim Henderson, and Dr. Kim Hyatt all provided insight and support during the process. I am grateful for Dr. Miller's expertise in qualitative research; Dr. Henderson's encouragement and guidance with style; and Dr. Hyatt's excitement toward my project and her command for the English language. I am a better person and professional for having worked with them.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Kindergarten programs have changed dramatically since the first full-day kindergarten in the United States was opened in 1857. The goal of this German-speaking program was to nurture and protect young children while developing all dimensions of the self before children are introduced to formal academics (Lee et al., 2006). In 1873, the first English-speaking public kindergarten program was developed and kindergarten goals quickly changed to the development of the whole child. At this time the learning goals were achieved through self-directed play (Lee et al., 2006). Now, the federal No Child Left Behind law (2001) has added increasing accountability to schools to perform at higher levels. School districts are seeking ways to meet the law's requirement for all students in grades three through twelve to reach a proficient level in reading and math by the year 2014. One such focus of school change is a move toward greater early intervention programming, including the implementation of full-day kindergarten programs. However, according to a study of state policies in the United States, some early childhood educators have questioned the value of full-day kindergarten in the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children (Manning & Patterson, 2005). Nevertheless, a growing number of school districts have begun all-day kindergarten programs to meet the need for academic and social improvement in their schools, as well as helping to meet a need for child care in the communities (Burriss, 2000; Lee et al., 2006).

One school district in Southwestern Pennsylvania has restructured a small, underutilized school building to create a learning atmosphere that is dedicated to the

development of kindergarten students. The program espouses to offer parental choice of kindergarten program for their child, collaboration of teachers which promotes focused instruction and activities, and has the flexibility to meet various student needs in one centralized location. The variety of kindergarten programs, the centralized nature of delivery and the model of collaboration that the district intended when the center was developed all provide an excellent backdrop for qualitative inquiry in the form of a case study through the lens of teacher collaboration. I will seek to investigate the problem of meeting state and national school reform goals through the implementation of a comprehensive kindergarten model, grounded in a collaborative environment, to bolster early education programs within the district.

#### *Context of Early Childhood Program Participation*

In the early 1980s, thirty percent of kindergarten aged children in the United States attended all-day programs. By 1993 more than fifty-four percent of U. S. kindergarteners were enrolled in all-day programs (Burriss, 2000; Lee et al., 2006). In 2000, sixty-one percent of mothers with children under the age of three were employed and only twenty-seven percent of children whose mothers worked received their primary care from a parent. Accordingly, with a greater number of dual income families in the workforce as well as greater numbers of single parent families, parents are increasingly looking to all-day kindergarten programs to assist with child care (Burriss, 2000).

The growing number of two income families and the current shift toward more academic kindergarten programs has had an effect on preschool enrollment. Additionally, in 1990, the concern about the continuing differences in school readiness between children from different socioeconomic levels led the government to endorse the first

national educational goal. At this time, the goal was that all children should enter school ready to learn by the year 2000. This could account for the increase of children entered in pre-school programs. (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004). As a result, sixty-six percent of all four year olds were enrolled in a preschool program in 2001 (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004). Regardless of a child's readiness for kindergarten; however, public schools are charged with the task of providing academic and social experiences at a level that will help schools meet the goals of the No Child Left Behind law that requires all students to reach proficiency in math and reading by the year 2014.

#### *Research on Kindergarten Program Efficacy*

Saam and Nowak (2005) completed a study of mid-western kindergarteners from families with low to moderate income to examine the academic achievement effects of full-day versus half-day kindergarten programs. This comparative study used the data collected from state achievement tests (ISTEP+) after the third grade. Saam and Nowak (2005) found that students previously enrolled in half-day programs scored higher in mathematics and language arts. On the other hand, Manning and Patterson (2005) argued that there are no adverse effects on children who attend full-day programs and children in these programs show significantly stronger academic gains than those that attend half-day classes. Also, children who have attended full-day kindergarten programs tend to be more self-confident, cooperative, independent, and engage in a greater amount of social interaction (Shaffer, 2004). Likewise, attributing better performance to increased time on task, another study that longitudinally compared full-day and half-day programs found that teachers expected their full-day students to perform better, in general, than their half-

day counterparts (Wolgemuth et al., 2006). Their study also demonstrated that children in full-day kindergarten do learn more through that experience than half-day students.

Interestingly, a longitudinal study of over 21,000 students completed by Finn and Pannozzo (2004) indicated that while students in full-day kindergarten programs perform higher on all academic engagement scales, teachers rate half-day classes as better behaved than full-day classes. In contrast, Shaffer (2004) collected behavioral data at the end of first grade rather than the end of kindergarten for her doctoral dissertation. Shaffer (2004) found that there was no significant difference in the behaviors regardless of whether the students participated in half-day or all-day kindergarten programs. As one can see, current research regarding kindergarten program effectiveness is often contradictory and further research is warranted to investigate specific kindergarten delivery models.

Regardless to the quantitative data, many still feel that full-day kindergarten should be implemented for “intangible” reasons including: greater utilization of time, parents and teachers are satisfied with full-day programs, school attendance is better for full-day students and full-day programs do not harm students or cause burnout (Saam & Nowak, 2005). For example, Burriss (2000) would agree with Saam and Nowak (2005) that full-day kindergarten is a viable alternative for day care for two income and single parent families.

### *Historical Context of Reform*

Most school reforms are driven by societal changes and events rather than by the academic needs of students (Bunting, 1999). As an example, the launching of the Sputnik satellite in 1957 by the Soviet Union resulted in the creation of the National

Science Foundation and also promoted an increased emphasis on math and science in schools due to a fear that the United States would fall behind other countries with regard to military might (Duschl, Shouse, & Schweingruber, 2007). Also, during this time frame, Rudolph Flesch wrote *Why Johnny Can't Read*, which placed blame on schools for failing to teach students the basics in math and science (Bunting, 1999). The release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 recommended increased graduation requirements, more academic rigor, academic standards for performance, increased time devoted to teaching basics, improved teacher preparation, school leader accountability and fiscal support for schools. Additionally, this report became the springboard to school reform issues, such as the standards movement (Bermudez & Lindahl, 1999).

More recently, educational reforms have included school choice, magnet schools with specialized curriculum, and publically funded charter schools that are controlled by private sector organizations (Bunting, 1999). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has established a greater level of accountability on public schools by establishing specific learning targets in math and reading with the mandate that all students will reach proficiency by 2014. Now that the federal NCLB law has added increased pressure on schools to perform at higher levels, school districts are seeking ways to meet the requirements of the law and, as a result, early intervention through more academic full-day kindergartens has become in vogue (Manning & Patterson, 2005). As such, there is a continuing debate swirling around kindergarten programs and it has been intensified by Pennsylvania Governor, Ed Rendell's commitment to early education as a form of school reform (Office of the Governor, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2006).

Governor Rendell has provided over 200 million dollars through the Accountability Block Grant to 419 school districts for the creation of prekindergarten programs as well as developing and expanding full-day kindergarten programs throughout Pennsylvania (Office of the Governor, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2006). Governor Rendell's push for all-day kindergarten can be viewed as a move toward greater academic rigor to promote student learning. This study will examine how one school district reacted to recent early childhood education reform in Pennsylvania by creating a kindergarten only building that offers full-day, half-day, and extended-day kindergarten programs. Early childhood school reform was the backdrop for the development of the kindergarten only building. However, the desire to provide an atmosphere where teacher collaboration would flourish was a consistent theme that drove the overall program design.

### *Context of Collaboration*

Creating an atmosphere where teacher collaboration would drive the planning and instruction of the kindergarten programs in this building was a key factor in its implementation. Collaboration involves creating communities of professionals, "community" deriving its meaning from the Latin word *communis* which means common or sharing, working together to become problem solvers and change agents (Welch, 1998). In the discussion of looking towards others for support, shared decision making and empowerment, one must look to collaboration as a conduit for educational reform (West, 1990) and a critical component of the change process (Fullan, 1993). Therefore, I will utilize collaboration theory to inform my analysis of this building and its programs.

Specifically, I will refer to the work of Marshall Welch who has established clear principles of collaboration.

The form through which collaboration takes place seems to differ among professionals. Some see collaboration as a synergistic relationship between leaders and followers (Cohen, 1997) that provides a new sense of empowerment for all stakeholders (Kremenitzer & Myler, 2006). Others describe a collaborative process involved in team teaching where teacher buy-in and shared planning is essential for instruction of students with diverse learning needs (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2001; Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2007). Kremenitzer and Myler (2006) also describe collaboration as problem-based unit planning that addresses multiple criteria through the integration of subjects and content. On a more basic level, collaboration can be considered the process of sharing tangible items such as materials and intangible resources such as control to meet a common goal (Welch, 1998). Welch (1998) sums up the discussion by stating that collaboration takes place in many ways including consultation, team teaching and various forms of problem solving.

Even though collaboration is defined differently by many people, most agree that it serves an important role in education. Palmer (1998) stated:

If we want to grow in our practice, we have two primary places to go: to the inner ground from which good teaching comes and to the community of fellow teachers from whom we can learn more about ourselves and our craft (p. 141).

For this reason, collaboration will provide the lens through which this case will be analyzed.

### Statement of Research Purpose

The purpose of this research is to investigate the collaborative exercises of a kindergarten only building to determine how this approach to planning and delivering kindergarten instruction can lend insights into effective teaching that can assist school districts in meeting the long term accountability standards that have been established through the No Child Left Behind legislation. Additionally, I will seek to develop an understanding about how collaboration influences the perceived success or failure of this model. The targeted research site, a kindergarten building in a Western Pennsylvania School District, presents a unique model for instructional planning and delivery compared to other Pennsylvania school districts. Therefore, I am interested in identifying the key principles of collaboration that support this model. At this kindergarten only building, there is a high rate of students surpassing Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) benchmarks and reading at a first grade level by the end of the first semester. I will investigate the key factors of this success including teacher collaboration activities, focused activities and curriculum.

### Research Questions

I will attempt to draw connections between Pennsylvania's early childhood school reform efforts with this kindergarten program's delivery model through the framework of collaboration as a key component to the perceived success of the kindergarten building's students. There are many variables by which success can be defined. This research will look at the effect of collaboration on the overall kindergarten model including student academic and progress. The underlying research questions are: (1) How does collaboration influence the overall teaching and learning environment at a building

dedicated to the instruction of kindergarten students? (2) How has the current era of accountability and reform influenced the nature of collaboration in a building dedicated to the instruction of kindergarten students?

The review of the literature brings to question some assumptions regarding the implementation of full-day kindergarten programs such as students who participate in full-day kindergarten will behave better and perform better academically than their half-day counterparts. Further research must be completed to examine the long-term effects of full-day and half-day programs across socioeconomic classes. More importantly to this study, additional research should be completed to identify the effectiveness of collaboration on the planning and instructional approach used in both full and half-day programs. The literature also demonstrates a gap in the research regarding specific, unique models such as a kindergarten only building that this case study will investigate. Teacher, staff and administrator perceptions about collaboration, building climate, planning and leadership are all unique and must be examined to identify if there is a perceived benefit to the overall kindergarten program from this model.

A case study of a Western Pennsylvania School District's kindergarten program that is housed in a one-grade (kindergarten) building is planned. I plan to observe teachers in all three programs: full-day, half-day, and extended-day as they plan and deliver content. These teachers will be observed as they participate in all facets of their day, including formal and informal meetings, teaching, carrying out building supervision duties, and assemblies. Additionally, I will complete semi-structured interviews with teachers, administrators, and support staff to attempt to find emerging themes. Finally, document analysis will provide strength to the data.

As themes emerge, the story of the kindergarten building will describe how collaboration is a key component to this particular school reform model and contributes to the overall success, or lack of success, of both full-day and half-day programs, as well as fully describing the benefits and pitfalls of utilizing a kindergarten model that meets Pennsylvania's early childhood educational reforms.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The role of kindergarten programming has recently emerged, through school reform efforts, to the forefront of early intervention models. As such, recent research has focused on the social, emotional, and academic benefits of kindergarten programming. Researchers have attempted to shed light on the benefits of full-day and half-day kindergarten programs. This project seeks to delineate the progression of how kindergarten has been conceptualized and to situate this progression within the current context of accountability and early childhood school reform. Additionally, the reviewed literature is also organized to investigate the role of collaboration in the educational decision making process.

For the purposes of this study, I did not include articles from outside North America in an attempt to avoid the consideration of possible cultural differences especially when these readings are intended to develop the framework for a case study of a small, rural Pennsylvania kindergarten building's unique program.

#### Historical Perspective

The first full-day kindergarten in the United States was a German speaking kindergarten founded in Wisconsin in 1857 by Margarethe Schurz. The intent of this kindergarten program was to offer a “nurturing, protected place where young children would spend time developing all dimensions of the self before their introduction to the formal academic rigors...” (Lee et al., 2006, p. 166). The first public English-speaking program was developed in 1873 and the goals quickly changed to the development of the

whole child. Lee et al. (2006) stated that learning goals were achieved through self-directed play. Interest in kindergarten programs grew substantially between 1890 and 1910 as educators became convinced that students would flourish socially, emotionally and academically in this setting. Still, formal academic instruction was considered to be detrimental to the child during this time period. Kindergarten was a time for children to prepare for school (Stipek, 2006).

This philosophy continued until the 1970s when the value of educational programs, based on learning standards for young children, began to be recognized (Lee et al., 2006). Pressure caused by the emphasis on standards and academic accountability made it difficult to justify the use of open-ended, play-based instructional practices (Goldstein, 2007) and precipitated a change to more formal, academic curriculum (Lee et al., 2006). Even though Goldstein (2007) argued that the standards-based accountability systems were not put in place with the intent of eliminating developmental, child-centered kindergartens, kindergarten classrooms began to resemble first grades due to the standards and assessment movement (Stipek, 2006) where kindergarten classrooms are becoming more and more academically oriented (Brannon, 2005).

Furthermore, efforts to improve early intervention programs, based on academic learning standards, has promoted the expansion of full-day kindergarten programs with an emphasis on the development of academic skill mastery and not simply meeting students' developmental needs (Goldstein, 2007). However, according to a study of state policies in the United States, some early childhood educators question the value of full-day kindergarten in the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children (Manning & Patterson, 2005). Nevertheless, a growing number of school districts have

started all-day kindergarten programs to meet the need for academic and social improvement in their schools (Burriss, 2000).

While the goals and expectations for early childhood learning have changed through the implementation of full-day kindergarten classes (Goldstein, 2007), it has also served to help to meet a need for child care in the communities. Thirty percent of kindergarten aged children in the United States attended all-day programs in the 1980s and more than fifty-four percent of U. S. kindergarteners were enrolled in all-day programs by 1993 (Burriss, 2000; Lee et al., 2006). In 2000, sixty-one percent of mothers with young children were employed and only twenty-seven percent of children whose mothers work received their primary care from a parent. With a greater number of dual income families in the workforce as well as greater numbers of single parent families, parents are increasingly looking to all-day kindergarten programs to assist with child care (Burriss, 2000).

Consequently, as parents look to full-day kindergarten to help with child care, elementary schools have increased the demands on children and as kindergarten becomes more academic, children entering school without basic literacy and math skills are at a significant disadvantage (Stipek, 2006). In the past decade, United States pre-school programs have expanded rapidly (McEntire & Cesarone, 2008) with more than seventy percent of children between the ages of three and five attending day care facilities (Moore et al., 2007). Stipek (2006) suggested that teaching preschoolers basic skills can give them a good foundation for their school careers. Additionally, there is a need for pre-school children to be exposed to emergent literacy skills including phonological awareness, phoneme blending and segmenting (Bauserman, 2005).

## Readiness for Kindergarten

Readiness can be defined in academic terms as well as a level of maturity in the child. Academic readiness reflects cognitive skills that children must possess (Nelson, 2005). Manning and Patterson (2005) argue that gaps already exist by race, income level and ethnicity by the time these children enter kindergarten. Preschool education can give children from economically disadvantaged homes, who average a year to a year and a half behind their middle class peers in terms of school readiness, a better chance of succeeding in school by building cognitive skills (Stipek, 2006). In 1990, the concern about the continuing differences in school readiness between children from different socioeconomic levels led the government to endorse the first national educational goal: “By the year 2000, all children should enter school ready to learn” (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004).

Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, and Waldfogel (2004) and Nelson (2005) explain the importance of the child’s home and pre-school environment to their readiness for school. Children who are read to and are immersed in literacy-rich environments grow up to be successful learners (Moore et al., 2007). As such, knowledge of print concepts has been demonstrated to be a strong predictor of beginning reading success and listening comprehension; both are necessary components of emergent reading acquisition (Bauserman et al., 2005). However, achieving high academic standards requires the need to emphasize the nonacademic aspects of child development as well (Stipek, 2006).

Readiness with regard to social preparedness for school is reflected in a child’s cooperation and appropriate social skills. Additionally, children’s social skills, emotional maturity and attitudes toward learning directly affect their academic learning (Nelson,

2005; Stipek, 2006). There is a relationship between academic underachievement and problem social behaviors in children as well. Unfortunately, the beginning signs of anti-social behavior are regularly ignored while students are in preschool (Lane et al., 2006). On the other hand, Children who have good social skills such as empathy, attentiveness to others' needs, are helpful, respectful and engage in sustained social interactions tend to achieve academically at a higher level than children who lack social skills (Stipek, 2006). Learning that occurs through informal and formal activities in the home or at day care has a significant effect on children's future school success (Nelson, 2005). Meanwhile, the differences in early childhood experiences play a formative role in shaping school readiness and help explain skill gaps at school entry (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004).

Nelson (2005) argues that readiness is more closely related to the environment in which the children live and not a characteristic of the child. With the average cost of private pre-school estimated to be between four and six thousand dollars per year, formal child care can be cost prohibitive for low income families (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004). Thankfully, school readiness can be accomplished through home-based learning activities. These experiences should not be limited to literacy, but also play and cultural activities. Parents who engage in multiple learning activities with their children on a regular basis give their children a strong foundation for future learning (Nelson, 2005).

Never the less, there has been a dramatic increase of students that attend early education programs in recent years. In 2001, sixty-six percent of all four year olds were enrolled in a preschool program (Magnuson et al., 2004). The primary purpose of

traditional preschools is to provide early educational experiences to three and four year old children and expanding public preschool programs is an increasingly popular strategy for narrowing the achievement gaps and preparing students for elementary school (Brannon, 2005). As stated earlier, private pre-schools are expensive. Therefore, the federal government funds Head Start, a program for children from low-income households and children with developmental delays or disabilities. About twelve percent of children were enrolled in Head Start in 2001. This represents more than half of the children that are eligible (Magnuson et al., 2004). Nelson (2005) argues that these high-risk children that receive preschool still perform lower than children from risk-free environments when they reach kindergarten. Nevertheless, Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel (2004) write that children enrolled in some form of preschool program display evidence of a positive effect on school readiness and that children in child care center-based programs have better reading and math skills as they enter kindergarten. Also, enrollment in public pre-kindergarten programs is related to gains in academic skills and is associated with higher reading and math skills at school entry (McEntire & Cesarone, 2008).

While learning to read and write as well as learning to relate to others is a worthy educational goal (Schmidt et al., 2007), the United States is experiencing an “accountability shakedown” (Hatch, 2002, p. 457). Student accountability has become a critical issue in American education and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has increased the scrutiny and pressure on teachers and children to provide evidence of academic achievement (Schmidt et al., 2007). The United States No Child Left Behind Act mandates the implementation of statewide accountability systems that are comprised

of challenging state standards in reading and math and annual testing to assess mastery of those standards for all public school students in grades three through eight (NCLB Act of 2001). Although grades pre-kindergarten through two were not included in NCLB's call for standards and accountability, the pressure to ensure that children enter third grade with an academic foundation that will prepare them to earn passing scores on the high-stakes reading and mathematics tests in their futures has led to an increased emphasis on the development of academic skills in the earliest years of schooling (Goldstein, 2007). Additionally, kindergarten has been affected by the states' decision to adopt content standards indicating the knowledge and skills to be mastered by the end of kindergarten as part of state accountability systems (Goldstein, 2007).

### Kindergarten Efficacy

#### *Social and Emotional Growth*

One response to the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act has been greater movement toward full-day kindergarten programs. However, there is concern that this is an attempt to simply fill children's days with more academic work (Jacobson, 2005). Goldstein (2007) stated that kindergarten has changed from the bridge between early educational experiences and the rigors of real school now that standards delineate the specific knowledge and skills that students must master. Furthermore, one of the most consistent educational findings is that the amount of time that children are actively engaged in tasks they can perform successfully contributes significantly to academic achievement (Simmons et al., 2007).

Although the typical half-day session satisfies the needs of many students, extra time provides an opportunity for additional skill development and mastery of important

basic concepts so that students can become successful in elementary school (Malak, 2002). Full-day kindergarten programs allow children to make more progress academically during the kindergarten year (Jacobson, 2005) because teachers are able to devote more attention to small group and one-to-one interaction with students to address their needs through developmentally appropriate curriculum and activities (Malak, 2002). Additional benefits of the extra time include more opportunities to assess children and tailor instruction to meet specific needs as well as building a better rapport with parents (Jacobson, 2005). The quality and quantity of learning opportunities found in full-day kindergarten are viewed as major school related causes of students' academic achievement (Hong & Raudenbush, 2005). Typical half-day kindergarten programs have little time for instruction beyond the basics (Jacobson, 2005). And, instructional time, along with instructional design, contributes to significant differences in kindergarten performance (Simmons et al., 2007).

It is clear that full-day students are exposed to more, what is not clear is what they are getting more of (Jacobson, 2005). Given a finite amount of time, evidence suggests that specificity in the instructional design and the use of instructional time affect early learning outcomes (Simmons et al., 2007). The question is whether or not there is a substantial benefit, academically and socially, for children that participate in all-day kindergarten? Burris (2000) stated that positive social and academic benefits were found in students that attended all-day kindergarten programs. Brannon (2005) adds that full-day kindergarten provides benefits to children regarding socialization and peer relations and helps students transition to elementary school as well as having a positive effect on the self esteem of children. Also, children who attended full-day kindergarten programs

tend to be more self-confident, cooperative, independent, and engage in a greater amount of social interaction (Shaffer, 2004). Finn and Pannozzo (2004) stated that it is not surprising that academic engagement and social engagement found in full-day kindergarten programs are strongly related to academic performance. The full-day learning environment which supports the development of pro-social skills is critical to academic outcomes and helps children to successfully function in elementary school (Schmidt et al., 2007).

Literature on classroom behavior of kindergarten students looks more closely at classroom setting and organization than individual differences and school readiness. Rimm-Kaufman, La Paro, Downer, and Pianta (2005) describe the indicators of social success in kindergarten as the child's engagement in classroom activities, compliance with the teacher and cooperation with their peers. Children were less likely to be off-task during structured teacher-directed activities than during activities that require less teacher direction such as centers. In addition, the quality of instruction and teacher-child relationships contributed to higher rates of cooperative behavior and appropriate social interaction of the child (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005).

Interestingly, the longitudinal study of over 21,000 students completed by Finn and Pannozzo (2004) indicated that while students in full-day kindergarten programs perform higher on all academic engagement scales, teachers rate half-day classes as better behaved than full-day classes. But, on an individual basis, teachers rated the individual students in half-day and all-day classes similarly. This could be the result that half-day programs spend more time in structured activities that leave them less time to engage in disruptive behavior. Fatigue may also contribute to the child's ability to attend

over the course of an entire day. As the children become tired, they are less able to control their behavior. Fatigue of the teacher may also lower their tolerance to off-task behaviors of the students (Finn & Pannozzo, 2004). Nelson, Stage, Epstein, & Pierce (2005) argue similarly. According to their study, children with behavioral disorders who received pre-reading intervention did show significant gains in their phonological awareness, word reading, and rapid letter naming skills. Unfortunately, these results did not translate to improved social behavior by these children.

In her doctoral dissertation, Shaffer (2004) followed full and half-day kindergarten students through their first grade year. In contrast to previous studies, she collected behavioral data at the end of first grade rather than the end of kindergarten. Her findings were quite different than previous studies. Shaffer (2004) found that there was no significant difference in the behaviors regardless of whether the students participated in half-day or all-day kindergarten programs. Schmidt, Burts, Durham, Charlesworth, and Hart (2007) concur and further argue that both positive and negative behaviors are linked to the developmentally appropriate (or inappropriate) practices modeled by the kindergarten teachers. The results of their study suggest that that the teacher's choice of guidance strategies impact the children's interpersonal relations as well as social and moral development (Schmidt et al., 2007). Manning and Patterson (2005) argue that there are no adverse effects on children who attend full-day programs.

### *Academic Achievement*

Kindergarten is where students formally begin to acquire the academic skills they will use throughout their lifetime (Brannon, 2005). As such, children in full-day programs show significantly stronger academic gains than those that attend half-day

classes (Manning & Patterson, 2005). Jacobson (2005) and Simmons et al. (2007), attribute better achievement to increased time on task where children are engaged in activities that they can perform successfully.

A study which longitudinally compared full-day and half-day programs found that teachers expected their full-day students to perform better, in general, to their half-day counterparts due to additional time (Wolgemuth et al., 2006). This study also demonstrated that children in full-day kindergarten do learn more through that experience than half-day students. Nonetheless, the additional learning appears to decline rapidly, so much so that the benefits of full-day kindergarten have diminished to a level that has little value by the start of first grade (Wolgemuth et al., 2006).

Lee et al.'s (2006) study compared the effectiveness of half and full-day programs with regard to literacy and mathematics. Their nation-wide study utilized sample data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort. Again, the results of Lee and her colleagues mirror those of Wolgemuth's study team: students who experience full-day kindergarten have a cognitive advantage to those who participate in half-day programs. However, they cannot conclude that full-day kindergarten is more effective for children of different social backgrounds, but full-day kindergarten demonstrates consistent learning benefits in all regions of the United States except the west (Lee et al., 2006).

Another study that investigated the use of integrated learning systems (i.e. computer software to support the core curriculum) found no significant difference in academic performance between full or half-day programs. However, utilizing the

software, regardless of program, provided effective practice of emergent literacy skills in the classroom (Bauserman, Cassady, Smith, & Stroud, 2005).

In the converse to the previously mentioned research, Saam and Nowak (2005) completed a study of mid-western kindergarteners who come from families with low to moderate incomes to examine the academic achievement effects of full versus half-day kindergarten programs. This comparative study used the data collected from state achievement tests (ISTEP+) after the third grade. Saam and Nowak (2005) found that students previously enrolled in half-day programs scored higher in mathematics and language arts. Also, there was no significant difference between those that were enrolled in morning kindergarten versus afternoon kindergarten.

However, many still feel that full-day kindergarten should be implemented for intangible reasons including: greater utilization of time, parents and teachers are satisfied with full-day programs, school attendance is better for full-day students and full-day programs does not harm students or cause burnout (Saam & Nowak, 2005). Additionally, Burriss (2000) would agree with Saam and Nowak (2005) that full-day kindergarten is a viable alternative for day care for two income and single parent families.

Given the mixed data on full and half-day kindergarten programs with regard to academic, social and emotional growth, parents choose kindergarten programs, when able, based on their own personal perceptions. In an article written by Brannon (2005), parents' perceptions of half-day and full-day kindergarten programs were described. Parents of both full and half-day students spoke about the importance of kindergarten in influencing their child's attitudes about school and that kindergarten is an important year to lay the groundwork for future learning as well as to develop a positive attitude about

learning. Brannon (2005) and Jacobson (2005) both stated that although research has shown that full-day kindergarten students outperform half-day students at the end of kindergarten on standardized tests, parents perceive both programs to be effective in preparing students for academic success in the first grade because these initial gains no longer exist just months into first grade. The decision by parents to send their child to full-day or half-day kindergarten was not greatly influenced by whether there was a parent at home during the day or not. Parents' decisions regarding program placement was most influenced by their child's preschool experience, parents' perceptions of their own ability to effectively work with the child at home, and parents' perceptions of their child's maturity level (Brannon, 2005). Regardless of the kindergarten program type, parents feel that building self esteem should be the most important goal of kindergarten with academic performance second. However, No Child Left Behind has positioned kindergarten, due to the standards based accountability system, as the starting point for an expanding curriculum of increasing complexity and depth that moves children toward academic mastery and prepares students for success on high stakes tests (Goldstein, 2007).

### School Reform

In response to societal demands, schools regularly initiate new programs to address curricular, administrative, or social problems (Greenfield, 1995). Therefore, public schooling in the United States has undergone a tremendous expansion and has recognized improvements in outcomes (Bracey, 1997). As a result, schools are better than before with more students taking a more challenging curriculum, completing advanced math and science classes and succeeding in Advanced Placement courses. Also, if the

United States is considered to be the preeminent nation in the world and ninety percent of adults were schooled in the public systems, how can one say that public schools are a failure (Moses, 2006)?

Unfortunately, most school improvement programs do not endure over long periods of time (Greenfield, 1995). Moses (2005) pointed to the political nature of most school reforms and the autocratic nature of reforms from the federal and state levels as reasons for limited compliance and short-lived initiatives. As such, genuine change is difficult to effect in established school systems and is difficult to maintain after the initial pressure is eased (Greenfield, 1995). Bunting (1999) argued that one school reform is not yet complete before a new reform appears and most reforms are driven by societal changes and events rather than by the academic needs of students.

To increase the chance for more complete implementation, school reforms must be initiated for the long-term (Moses, 2006) and effect larger, systemic changes rather than small changes (Greenfield, 1995). Reforms must also be monitored and supported through good leadership to have a lasting effect while addressing the costs of universal reforms that are estimated to be nearly 4.8 billion dollars (Greenfield, 1995; Moses, 2006).

In an attempt to address societal and political issues since the 1950s, the United States has attempted to implement several large-scale reform initiatives. For example, Duschl, Shouse, and Schweingruber (2007) discuss two major science reforms since 1950 including the creation of the National Science Foundation and the United State's reaction to the launching of Sputnik in 1957 which fueled the fear that the U.S. would lose military superiority if we did not invest in the education of future scientists and

engineers. Also, during this time frame, *Why Johnny Can't Read* by Rudolph Flesch was published and schools were blamed for failing to teach students the basics in math and science (Bunting, 1999). In 1983, the release of *A Nation at Risk* changed the reform focus to teacher development and professionalization (Scribner et al., 1999) and increased the graduation requirements for English, math, and science as well as adopting more rigorous, measurable standards for academic performance (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* became the springboard to more than two-dozen major and several hundred minor reports that addressed a variety of school reform issues Bermudez and Lindahl, (1999). Then, in 1989, the National Goals 2000 initiative drew attention to the importance of early intervention and pre-school programs to support the individual success of children and advanced a societal goal of developing a better workforce (Winter & Kelly, 2008). Most recently, The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) has now established a new level of accountability on public schools by establishing specific learning targets in math and reading with the mandate that all students will reach proficiency by 2014. No Child Left Behind reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and represents the most expansive educational reform in United States History. The reform act addresses four key areas: school accountability; expanded flexibility for states and school districts; increased options for parents; and a reliance on research based strategies (Suskind, 2007). Other, small-scale reform initiatives have included school choice, magnet schools where specialized curricular options are offered, and charter schools that essentially are publicly funded schools that are organized by the private sector (Bunting, 1999).

Bunting states that each reform offers something of lasting value to schools (1999). However, the amount of these improvements is difficult to judge because there is no direct evidence that students have learned more during these reforms, reform movements have caused too narrow of instructional focus to specific goals and school reform efforts have continually changed curriculum and teaching strategies to meet the societal concerns of the era (Bracey, 1997; Bunting, 1999). One example to illuminate this fact would be the United States response to Sputnik. Prior to the launching of Sputnik, set theory was not taught as part of math. Therefore, set theory was injected into the new math at the time. If today's students were assessed with the post-Sputnik tests, the performance would be poor because set theory, again, is not being taught as it was at that time (Bracey, 1997).

Knowing that many large scale reform efforts have been met with limited compliance or only short term changes, Greenfield (1995) suggested that reform should involve the entire school to create a sense of community and a climate of mutual trust where all participants feel as if they are vital to school improvement. This effort requires commitment by the administration to implement collaboration at the local level (Muller & Thorn, 2007). This type of reform suggests a shift from schools as bureaucratic organizations to schools as communities characterized by shared norms and values, a focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice and collaboration (Scribner et al., 1999).

### Collaboration

Collaboration, as defined by West (1990) is an interactive planning or problem-solving process involving two or more team members. It is characterized by mutual

respect, trust, and open consideration to achieve a common goal (Hollins & Townsend, 2003). However, it is, as Welch (1998) puts it, one of the most misunderstood concepts in educational reform because it is not just people getting along with each other. Stakeholders must establish trust, develop and improve communication, share chores, celebrate, work together creatively to overcome inevitable challenges and problems, and anticipate conflict and handle it creatively (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2007). Kremenitzer and Myler (2006) acknowledge that collaboration, done correctly, requires extra effort, time, space and a commitment to coordinate with others. Welch (1998) identifies key factors that are involved in collaborative efforts: Interactive exchange of resources, decision making, problem solving, conflict management, interpersonal communication, and systemic influences.

Collaboration, in educational settings, is most often found in team teaching models where two or more teachers plan, teach, assess, and assume responsibility for all of the students in the classroom (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2007; Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2001). Welch (1998) calls collaboration the cornerstone of the inclusion movement for students with disabilities on the part of teachers, specialists, and parents. Also, collaboration in educational settings is found in project based unit planning that address multiple standards through integration of subjects and content (Kremenitzer & Myler, 2006). More frequently, collaboration is found between student and teacher with regard to developing classroom rules for the purpose of giving students ownership of their behavior (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2001).

With regard to instructional practice, collaboration impacts the roles of teaching and learning in that the affect on student learning becomes the focus (Bush, 2003). It is

essential to planning, conducting and evaluating learning activities and is critical for building and managing authentic, information-based learning (Schomberg, 2003).

Kremenitzer and Myler (2006) see collaboration as an opportunity for practitioners to improve their own practices, gain fresh perspective, and develop a new sense of empowerment over their teaching.

However, because teaching has traditionally occurred in isolation, problems may arise when collaboration is not integrated well. Such problems include fear of judgment by others and self doubt of an individual's value to the organization. This can occur when roles are poorly defined, there is a lack of clear expectations, and when implementation of ideas creates frustration (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2007). However, done correctly, collaboration can promote an increase to problem solving solutions, improve the quality of decisions, and engage a diverse level of expertise and resources. To make collaboration effective, Welch (1998) suggests that stakeholders must have similar values and goals, partnerships must be valued and desirable, and systemic support for collaboration must exist. Cohen (1997) identifies the relationship between teachers and principals as being synergistic when collaboration happens correctly. Most importantly, good collaboration requires the involvement of the right people and providing the resources needed to achieve a goal, establishing the culture and identity of the organization, committing to and building support for collaboration, developing purposeful interactions and building trust to promote the exchange of information and materials (McGuire, 2006)

## Conclusion

For many reasons the literature and research regarding the positive and negative effects of full-day and half-day kindergarten programs is inconclusive. Much of the research describing the benefits of full-day vs. half-day kindergarten programs is based on anecdotal reports because few studies have been conducted with subjects that were randomly assigned to either full or half-day (Jacobson, 2005). The review of the literature invalidates some assumptions regarding the implementation of full-day kindergarten programs: Students will behave better and perform better academically if they participate in full-day kindergarten. Further research must be completed to examine the long term effects of full-day vs. half-day programs across socioeconomic classes. Additional research should also be completed to find the specific differences in the instructional approach used in both full and half-day programs. Teachers and parents agree that the extra time is a benefit. However, how that time is being used and what is being taught during that time should be of interest to researchers.

This literature also demonstrates a gap in the research in specific, unique models such as the kindergarten building for which this researcher plans to complete a case study. Parent, teacher, and administrative perceptions of collaboration and its overall effects on planning, instruction, and climate are all unique, especially when one building only houses kindergarten and all of the various kindergarten programs for the entire district. The research questions will focus on the impact of collaboration in instructional delivery regardless of program and will illuminate the benefits of housing only kindergarten in one, central location within the district especially with regard to improving student performance as a reaction to early intervention school reform.

Here, the review of literature begins to paint a picture of differing kindergarten programs through a learning theory lens as well as attention to social and emotional development. Cognitive, social and emotional effects of kindergarten were discussed in this literature. This section also reviewed literature that focused on kindergarten through a historical perspective including school reform efforts, addressed differences in child readiness, informed the reader with regard to the social, emotional and cognitive benefits of full and half-day programs, and reviewed the scope of collaboration as a possible tool for improved teacher engagement. The groundwork is set to pursue a case study that will be far more comprehensive in nature.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

The purpose of all research, regardless of design, is to complete a careful search into a particular subject (Glesne, 2006). This search includes similar elements in both quantitative and qualitative work: stating of a purpose; posing of problems; raising questions; defining sample populations; collecting and analyzing data; and presenting outcomes (Glesne, 2006). However, qualitative research seeks to understand and interpret a particular subject through the use of multiple perspectives (Shank, 2006; Stake, 1995) while quantitative methods are designed to make generalizations about a study through a comparison of just a few variables (Glesne, 2006). Furthermore, Stake (1995) suggests that there are three distinct differences between qualitative and quantitative research: (1) the distinction between explaining versus understanding as the study purpose; (2) the personal versus impersonal role of the researcher; (3) knowledge discovered versus knowledge constructed. While quantitative researchers investigate cause and effect relationships, qualitative researchers seek to understand the meaning of a subject and the complex interrelationships that our found in a setting (Shank, 2006; Stake, 1995). The search for understanding or enlightenment of a subject that qualitative research promotes provides the researchers the opportunity to tell the story of unique situations (Delemont, 2002).

Qualitative research utilizes a variety of research strategies and methods to collect and analyze a wide range of data, from many perspectives (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) thus promoting a deeper understanding of things that are different rather than the typical

(Delemont, 2002). Stake (1995) describes this as a holistic treatment of a research problem because complex interactions occur frequently which need to be investigated thoroughly. The indication is that there are several sources of data that need to be considered when completing qualitative research: field notes from observations, interview transcriptions, transcripts of interactions with participants, documents, and pictures (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). All of this data can be collected and analyzed through observing, conversing, participating, and interpreting; the four skills Shank (2006) suggests that are basic to qualitative research. In qualitative research, all of these data streams and analysis skills assist the researcher to report through a thorough, “thick” description that fully conveys the experiences to the reader (Stake, 1995).

For the purposes of this research, I will use qualitative methods, in the form of a case study, to seek understanding to the following research questions: (1) How does collaboration influence the overall teaching and learning environment at a building dedicated to the instruction of only one grade level? (2) How has the current era of accountability and reform influenced the nature of collaboration in a building dedicated to the instruction of only one grade level? As stated above, qualitative methods will allow for multiple data sources which will provide varied perspectives into my research and will allow for a complete, detailed description of this case.

Specifically, this study will investigate how a small, rural, Pennsylvania school district has responded to recent early childhood school reform efforts through the development of a district-wide kindergarten center that purports to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of kindergarten-aged students through a collaborative model involving teachers, parents, and administrators. Such models are not typical in

Pennsylvania school districts. This kindergarten only building serves all of the district's kindergarten students through three distinct programs including five traditional full-day sections, three traditional half-day sections, and two extended-day sections where students who are considered to be at risk for reading difficulty receive the regular curriculum as well as additional support through a literacy intensive curriculum.

The following section will describe how I plan to use qualitative research methods, through a case study, to seek understanding into the aforementioned research questions. Data collection methods, through the use of observations, interviews, and document reviews will be described. Additionally, the chapter will fully explain the proposed methods of data analysis including triangulation and a system of data coding. Finally, this chapter will explain the methods I will use to ensure a high level of trustworthiness in the research including peer review, member checking and thick description.

### Case Study

Case studies, according to Stake (1995), are not sampling research, but are intended to better understand one specific subject, or case, such as a child, a classroom, or a group of professionals. Both Glesne (2006) and Stake (1995) state that a case is a specific, complex functional thing that is a bounded integrated system with working parts. Case studies are a rich source for insight and reflection because they allow for intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit (Merriam, 1998; Shank, 2006), which allows a researcher to involve perspectives and interactions that are typically overlooked in other research (Stake, 1995). Additionally, both Shank (2006) and Stake (1995) recommend that individual case studies should not be used to generalize research to

larger populations because single cases are unique situations. The objective, then, is to maximize what we can learn and understand about a specific subject (Stake, 1995).

Case studies are categorized according to the purpose of the study and, in some instances, the number of cases being considered at one time. In Robert Stake's book, *The Art of Case Study Research* (1995), he describes three types of case studies: (1) Intrinsic case study, (2) Instrumental case study, and (3) Collective case study. Intrinsic case studies contribute to a better understanding of a particular case such as the life of a child with ADHD (Glesne, 2006). Here, the case itself is the primary interest (Stake, 1995). Instrumental case studies are used when a particular case is studied to provide insight into an issue; the case itself is instrumental to the understanding of a particular phenomenon such as teacher response to the implementation of a new textbook (Glesne, 2006; Stake, 1995). A collective case study is used to examine a single topic through the perspective of several different individual case studies (Shank, 2006; Stake, 2007). Collective case studies allow researchers to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition (Glesne, 2006).

The study I conducted was an instrumental case study. The case, Middleton Kindergarten School and its stakeholders, is instrumental to learning about how collaboration influences the overall teaching and learning environment and how the current era of accountability and reform influences the nature of collaboration.

### Context

The proposed case is a kindergarten-only building in a rural Western Pennsylvania school district. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will use the pseudonym Middleton Kindergarten School and Star Center School District to name the

case and the district. All of the district's kindergarten students attend school in this building, which houses eight classrooms, a room for Title I reading instruction, a multi-purpose room, a computer lab and a library. The building, built in the 1950s, is located on the main street in a small, borough that is rapidly losing population to the surrounding townships of the district. The building is staffed by eight classroom teachers who teach full-day, half-day, and extended-day classes. A Title I reading teacher provides part-time reading support services to those students who qualify according to specific criteria. Students receive physical education, art, music, library and computer each week through itinerant, special area teachers who visit the school to provide instruction. Special education students are fully included in the regular classrooms with the assistance of teaching aides and the support of a special education teacher. There is an active Parent-Teacher Organization that supports extra-curricular activities as well as provides volunteers to work with teachers to provide their program.

The building was a former k-6 building that serviced only the children from the borough. Less than 100 students were attending school in that building while the districts other two, newly renovated buildings had extra space available. The district closed the building in June of 2003 and re-opened as a center for the district's kindergarten students in August, 2003. The sitting superintendent at that time wanted to promote an early childhood building that would allow for teacher collaboration and would be entirely focused on the kindergarten child. All activities, materials, and strategies would be directed to teaching kindergarten students.

The kindergarten programs have changed over the years. When the building opened, there were only two full-day kindergarten classes, one extended-day section, and

five half-day sections. Over the years, program selection has remained the same, but parental choice has changed considerably. Currently the building houses five full-day sections, two half-day sections and two-extended-day sections. The building boasts that the number of students that are reading on or above level by the end of the year is far above the average.

The students that attend the kindergarten building come from two separate townships and one borough within the district's boundaries. One township is growing at a considerable rate and serves as a bedroom community for professionals that work outside of the district. The other township is more rural. To maintain their country feel, the township has initiated an ordinance that only permits residential construction on lots of at least two acres. This township is home to many families that were born and raised at the family homestead or farm and currently work in local small industry. The district's borough is a small town with one traffic signal. The town was incorporated 175 years ago with shipping and brick making as its chief industries. Now, the town's houses are mostly rental properties for low-income families. A large majority of the district's economically disadvantaged students live in the borough.

All students that enter the kindergarten must be five years old prior to the first day of September of the school year of enrollment. While the population changes each year, the 2008-2009 class had 131 students: sixty-eight girls and sixty-three boys. Eighteen students took part in the extended-day program and another nineteen students received reading support through the Title I program. The school enrolled twenty-two percent of its students in the free and reduced lunch program which is slightly under the district

average of twenty-four percent. One student was repeating kindergarten while eighty-seven percent of the students had completed pre-school the previous year.

The eight classroom teachers come from various backgrounds and experiences. Five teachers have been employed by the district for five years or less, two of the teachers have between ten and fifteen years of experience and one teacher has over twenty years of experience. The Title I reading instructor has over twenty-five years of experience and is at the school daily. The special area teachers visit the school for one day per week to teach art, music, physical education, library and computers. The art teacher is in her first year, however, all of the other special area teachers have over fifteen years of experience.

This kindergarten building presents a unique case for early childhood instructional delivery. The initial purpose of the kindergarten building was to promote an atmosphere where the focus was on the kindergarten aged child including all instruction, curricular and extra-curricular activities, field trips, room design and planning. Additionally, the superintendent of the district at the time of development had a desire to place the kindergarten teachers in a place where they had the opportunity to collaborate and unify their practices rather than working in isolation as had occurred in their former buildings prior to the kindergarten building's development. Also because of the centralized location for all students, the district is able to offer flexibility of programming to the families which allows parents to make the decision of what instructional program is best for their child and family situation. Glesne (2006) identifies such a building as a bounded system with integral working parts. Kindergarten delivery models such as this are not typical and therefore a case study of the building, with a focus on collaboration, is warranted.

Furthermore, while there is much literature discussing the pros and cons of full-day versus half-day kindergarten with regard to social, emotional, and academic health of children, a gap in the research exists in describing unique kindergarten delivery models such as the kindergarten center found within this school district especially when looking through the lens of a collaborative partnerships between stakeholders. Parent and teacher perceptions, collaboration, atmosphere, focus of instruction and activities, and building level leadership are all perceived to be unique within this building and must be examined to identify if there is a perceived benefit to the overall kindergarten program.

### Data Collection

Data for this case study was collected through a series of interviews, observations and document analysis. To gain multiple perspectives, the study participants included current and former administration, current and former classroom and itinerant teachers, and support staff. All study participants completed consent to participate forms and confidentiality was assured. Pseudonyms were used to identify the school, the district, the geographic region and the individual participants. Reflexivity, where the data collection process is as important as the data itself, requires the researcher to continually question the research process throughout the entire study (Glesne, 2006).

### *Interviews*

The purpose of utilizing interviews for qualitative research is to discover multiple views and multiple realities of the case (Stake, 1995). There are three main types of interviews to be used: short questions that occur during observations; formal structured interviews; and semi-structured interviews (Delemont, 2002). Interview questions should

be structured to elicit unique experiences and stories from the participants rather than simple yes and no answers (Stake, 1995).

For this research, interviews were completed with multiple stake holders including teachers, administrators, and staff. With consent I interviewed the past and current administrators, the eight current classroom teachers and one former teacher, one former long-term substitute, the Title I teacher, the special education teacher, the building secretary and an instructional assistant. Interviews were semi-structured in nature so as to allow for additional probing into participant responses and all questions were loosely informed by Welch's framework of collaboration. The following table demonstrates the questions that were used for the semi-structured interview. Probing, follow-up questions were asked to each participant depending on their responses.

*Table 3.1: Semi-Structured Interview Questions*

- 
1. Please talk about your background and the experiences with collaboration that you have had in this setting.
  2. In what ways does collaboration influence the teaching and learning that occurs in your classroom?
  3. In what ways does collaboration occur on a daily basis?
  4. Is collaboration essential to the effectiveness of the kindergarten building?
  5. How has the current era of accountability and school reform influenced the nature of collaboration in the building?
- 

Participants in the study received notification via telephone contact, email, or letter that included the study purpose as well as researcher contact information and a consent form as outlined by the Duquesne University's Institutional Review Board. Confidentiality of all participants was assured and the identity of all research participants will remain anonymous. Pseudonyms were used to identify all participants in written

form. Upon completion of the research, all audio recordings were destroyed and all transcribed data will be stored in a locked storage cabinet for no more than five years.

### *Observations*

Observations allow a researcher to gather data over a longer period of time (Delemont, 2002) with the intent of moving from the unknown to the familiar (Glesne, 2006). Keeping the case as the target, observations assist the researcher toward gaining a better understanding. Observations must be documented with irrefutable descriptions of the events and the researcher must be observing the correct events (Stake, 1995). For example, one would not observe collaboration by observing an individual teacher conferencing with a student. Instead, observations of collaboration may take place in formal and informal meetings or during mutual preparatory time between two teachers. Delemont (2002) suggests that observations should include broad views of the case, looking for paradoxes, searching for possible problems facing the case, and general observations without an agenda. Following this design allows the observer to develop multiple perspectives.

I observed teachers, staff, and administrators in various settings for this research. Again, observations were framed by Welch's principles of collaboration and I noted the sharing of resources, instances of shared decision making and group problem solving, the ability to manage and work through conflict, interpersonal communications between staff, and the influences of building and district initiatives on the staff. One specific area of observation was during formal monthly staff meetings led by the building administrator. Additionally, the teachers hold weekly informal meetings without the principal being present which I observed. Other observations took place in the school

office, multi-purpose room, hallways and teacher's rooms to document group discussions that occur before and after school hours. I also observed teachers during common planning time. Lastly, I sought to view teachers' interactions with other stakeholders that tend to occur naturally during the course of the work day.

### *Document Analysis*

Reviewing document provides the researcher with an essential tool to understanding the whole case. Documents can serve as a substitute for the activities which the researcher was not able to observe directly (Stake, 1995). Additionally, the search for documents, such as newspaper clippings, correspondence, and meeting minutes, often elicits the support of others who may become involved in the research and provide background that may have otherwise been overlooked (Stake, 1995).

This case involved an in-depth look into the documentation surrounding the development of the kindergarten building as well as the current climate and activities. I reviewed press clippings from the building's opening as well as the PowerPoint presentation and minutes from the public meetings that proposed this option to the community. Correspondence from the superintendent and district newsletters were also analyzed. Historical and recent assessment data in reading and math, as well as discipline referral data was reviewed to assist me in drawing conclusions regarding the effectiveness of this model in the current accountability era. Other quantitative data will include the demographic data of the building including student population in each program, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status and family make up.

*Trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness of qualitative studies is determined by the dependability and credibility of data, the methods of data collection, and the detailed description of the research. In short, it is the degree to which a reader can trust the research findings (Shank, 2006).

The most common way to verify data is through triangulation. Triangulation occurs when data from different sources or from different collection methods are compared to provide a rounded, more authentic view of the case (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The search for accuracy and alternative explanations to research questions requires the protocols for triangulation rather than mere intuition and good intention by the researcher (Stake, 1995). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) agree, and they state that data are incomplete or partial versions of a case that are brought together through triangulation. While each data strand may not be strong enough to support a finding on its own, triangulation looks to different data sources and collection strategies to strengthen the evidence for a finding (Shank, 2006).

However, building trustworthiness in qualitative research cannot rely on triangulation alone. Other verification procedures must be utilized. One such verification procedure is peer review. Peer review asks for the input and reflection of the study by other research colleagues (Glesne, 2006). Also, member checking asks the participants to examine rough drafts of the writing where their actions or words are featured (Stake, 1995) to verify their perspectives, to allow participants to inform the researcher of problems in the writing, and to help develop new ideas and interpretations (Glesne, 2006). Reporting research findings through thick description is another verification

protocol. This is not a commonplace description, but writing that describes and probes the intentions, motives, meanings, contexts, situations, and circumstances of actions (Glesne, 2006; Stake, 1995). Finally, clarifying the research bias promotes trustworthiness as well. This requires reflection of one's own research paradigm and how subjectivity will be monitored (Glesne, 2006).

In an attempt to assure a high level of trustworthiness in this study, I utilized interviews, observations and document analysis for data collection over an extended period of time. Triangulation, member checking, peer review and thick description were implemented to verify data and inject a higher level of trustworthiness to the data and its reporting.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis, in qualitative research, focuses on words and conversations. Text becomes the object of analysis and is the window to the human experience (Glesne, 2006). This becomes a matter of giving meaning to the final compilations of data and requires logical steps to data interpretation (Stake, 1995). Shank (2006) suggests that a microscopic examination, or microanalysis of the data, entails line-by-line review of the data to generate initial categories and to suggest relationships among the data. Making sense of the data requires organization of what is seen, heard and read and utilizes a progressive process of sorting, defining, and redefining the data (Glesne, 2006). This process, called coding, finds systematic relationships among the data and provides a fresh view of what is there (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

There are two types of coding used in this process: open coding and axial coding. Open coding is the initial process of coding data based on general similarities and

differences (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Shank, 2006). Axial coding entails a deeper look and breaks down the original categories into sub-categories to create a more detailed and specific reflection of the data (Shank, 2006). The deep search for patterns, consistency and conditions is necessary in the search for meaning in the data (Stake, 1995).

The process of open and axial coding is considered to be an inductive analysis of the data. Comparing this data to a specific theoretical perspective is a deductive approach. In my research, I used both inductive and deductive data analysis to identify emerging themes and relating these themes to one another. Additionally, a thorough deductive analysis compared these themes and sub-themes to the principles of collaboration found in Welch's model. Data was categorized by the appropriate principle topic. Then, it was analyzed to learn how evident each principle is found in this building and, more importantly, how each principle manifests itself in the data especially with regard to instruction and teacher accountability.

#### Theoretical Framework

This case study was completed through the theoretical lens of collaboration. Welch (1998) developed a list of key principles of collaboration including the interactive exchange of resources, decision making, problem solving, conflict management, interpersonal communications, and systemic influences. These elements served as a framework for what should be included in a good collaborative model. All observations, interviews, and artifact reviews will be informed by Welch's principles of collaboration and will be analyzed with these core principles as the backdrop to the collaborative model.

Table 3.2: Collaboration Framework

<u>Principle</u>	<u>Descriptor</u>
Interactive exchange of resources	Exchanging tangible and intangible resources to meet a common goal
Decision making	Actions to reach a mutually defined goal
Problem Solving	Resolve a problem or meet a need
Conflict Management	Resolving a situation when one person perceives that another is interfering with goal attainment
Interpersonal communication	Effective verbal and non-verbal communication
Systemic Influences	Organization's factors intended to help meet a specific goal

### Research Paradigm

Research paradigms are frameworks through which a researcher views a study. A constructivist paradigm, which I claim, maintains that human beings construct their perceptions of the world and that each person's perception is their own reality (Glesne, 2006). Constructivists build their understanding from their personal experiences and inject their own cultural and historical perspectives into their meaning (Stake, 1995). Rather than passively acquiring knowledge, constructivists actively build their knowledge based on past experiences (Shank, 2006).

### Limitations of the Study

All research has study limitations and the traditional positivistic perspective of the subjective nature of qualitative research is seen as such. Qualitative researchers acknowledge their own biases and do not claim objectivity. However, they monitor their subjectivity through solid methodology and analysis that provides credibility and

trustworthiness to their findings (Glesne, 2006). In fact, qualitative research promotes a subjective paradigm which is considered by Stake (1995) to be an essential element of understanding.

Another limitation, found in case studies, are that they are a poor basis for generalization (Stake, 1995), but its purpose is not to generalize to larger populations. Rather, the purpose is to find meaning in the particular case (Shank, 2006).

As a researcher, I acknowledge my constructivist paradigm and subjective bias. Again, utilizing solid research methodology, protocols for data verification, and infusing trustworthiness through data analysis and thick description are essential. This case is narrow in scope and is not intended to be generalized across typical kindergarten programs. While the uniqueness of this kindergarten only building lends itself to case study inquiry, a comparison of this district's kindergarten building to another district's kindergarten program would not produce reliable data in that the factors that exist in one model, such as collaboration or targeted activities would not necessarily be available in another model. However, the intent is to inform decision makers of this model for future considerations. Finally, I acknowledge this study as backyard research based on a previously established relationship with the kindergarten building, the school district, and its personnel. However, my familiarity with the subject provides the opportunity to work comfortably with the participants. I must remain cognizant of my personal bias and establish trustworthiness of the data through peer review, member checking, triangulation and thick description.

## Conclusion

The intent of this research is not to create a comparison between kindergarten programs or to develop a cause and effect relationship between collaboration and successful kindergarten programs. Therefore, a case study will allow for intensive descriptions and analyses of a single unit (Merriam, 1998), the kindergarten building, and will allow the researcher to study the effect of collaboration on the kindergarten programs. Furthermore, because this researcher intends to observe the kindergarten building and its programs through the lens of collaboration, this study will be categorized as an instrumental case study in that the intent is to provide insight into an issue (collaboration) and to draw generalizations (Glesne, 2006).

The people and programs create a unique case. I set out to better understand the district's kindergarten building through a constructivist paradigm. Constructivist researchers believe that reality is created through the experiences and perceptions of each individual. This leads to each individual experiencing a different reality of a given phenomena. As such, each individual will have different opinions and beliefs based on their own experiences. Constructivists see the world, not as just what is, but an interpretation of what is by each individual (Glesne, 2006).

This study utilized a series of interviews, observations, and document analysis to identify various perceptions of the success or failure with which the kindergarten building serves the community. All data collection was informed by Welch's principles of collaboration. All data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis was transcribed and coded to identify emerging themes through the lens of collaboration.

Data from all sources was triangulated to increase trustworthiness. Other verification procedures included member checking, peer review and thick description.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

In this instrumental case study, I was engaged as the principal investigator for an eight week period. During that time I interviewed sixteen participants and completed over twenty-five hours of observations. Additionally, I reviewed several artifacts including: the building web site, local newspaper articles, district newsletters, parent handbooks, teacher handbooks, teacher schedules, and student assessment data. Deductive and inductive data analysis occurred throughout the data collection process, as well as after data collection was completed. As a result of a thorough and deep investigation into the collaborative exercises of the Middleton Kindergarten School, I am able to present a clear picture of the nature and effectiveness of the collaboration in this setting.

In this chapter, I will create a detailed picture of the building and the stakeholders who participated in this study. Demographic data of the study participants and a thorough explanation of the building's history, layout and schedule will set the context from which the collaborative practices were studied. The results of the deductive analysis will examine the extent to which the data are reflective of Welch's (1998) framework of effective collaboration. Reporting on the inductive analysis, I will demonstrate how the collected data answers the research questions and then offers insight into additional study results. Finally, the historical perspective of the collaborative practices as well as the overall building efficacy, in the form of student performance data, will be discussed.

### Research Questions

The following research questions were developed as the basis for this study.

These questions provide a framework for interpreting the results:

1. How does collaboration influence the overall teaching and learning environment at a building dedicated to the instruction of kindergarten students?
2. How has the current era of accountability and reform influenced the nature of collaboration in a building dedicated to the instruction of kindergarten students?

### Setting and Context

Star Center School District is a rural school district located in Western Pennsylvania and encompasses fifty-four square miles of land that includes farmland and housing plans. A small borough is located in the center of the district. The borough has one traffic light at the main intersection of town. This intersection makes up the downtown area and includes a bank, a florist, a pharmacy and a post office. The district's economic make up is clearly separated by township lines. The larger township is a bedroom community for white collar workers who travel to nearby business parks and larger communities for their employment. The smaller township and borough are comprised mostly of blue collar workers and small farmers who have lived most of their lives in the area. Combined, the two townships and borough have approximately 12,000 residents. Star Center School District is divided by a major highway and thus has easy access to points north and south of the district. The district is made up of five schools including one high school, one junior high school, two elementary schools that house

grades one through six and the Middleton Kindergarten School which was the site for this case study. District administrative offices are found in a separate building on the high school campus. The district services 1997 students in all of its schools.

Middleton Kindergarten School is located on the main street in the center of the borough. The school, opened as a kindergarten-only building in August of 2003, underwent minor renovations including new ceilings, improved lighting, air conditioning and fresh paint. The toilets, sinks, water fountains and chalkboards were all lowered to accommodate kindergarten aged students. In the hallways, murals of storybook characters were painted.

The building is a two-story, all brick structure originally built in 1955 and renovated and expanded in 1984. There are four classrooms on the first floor and four classrooms on the second floor. The office, nurse's suite, library, multi-purpose room, computer lab and a small room for Title I reading are also on the first floor. Stairs are located in the front and rear of the building for access to the second floor. There are five full-day classes. Four full-day classes are on the second floor with the fifth at the base of the steps on the first floor. All half-day and extended-day classes are housed on the first floor

Middleton Kindergarten houses 131 students in three programs: full-day, half-day and extended-day. Ethnically, 97% of the students are white while <2% of the students are black, <1% Hispanic and <1% Asian. Economically, 22% of the students participate in the free and reduced lunch program which is just above the district average of 21% economically disadvantaged.

During public meetings held in the spring of 2003, the Superintendent suggested that he would like to always offer the flexibility of full-day and half-day programs so that the parents could choose a program that they feel would be the best fit for their child. Students who participate in the extended-day program must qualify based on pre-reading screenings and parental approval. During the first year as a kindergarten school in 2003, Middleton housed a total of 119 students. Of those, only thirty-five chose full-day kindergarten (two sections), the remaining students attended half-day programs with eighteen of those students staying for the extended-day program. 2003 was the first year Star Center School District was able to offer full-day kindergarten and the trend has been for greater numbers of families to choose full-day as their program. In the 2008-2009 school year, there are five full-day sections, three half-day sections (two A.M. and one P.M.) and two extended-day sections (one A.M. and one P.M.). The full-day program services 101 Students. The remaining thirty students participate in the half-day program. However, eighteen of the half-day students remain in school for the entire day for additional literacy instruction as participants in the extended-day program.

#### Middleton Kindergarten Faculty

The teachers of Middleton Kindergarten School come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. As a kindergarten only building, Middleton is only in its sixth year of existence. Thus, many of the teachers have had experiences outside of this setting both teaching kindergarten as well as other grade levels. Additionally, several study participants were past stakeholders in the kindergarten school and are no longer teaching in the building. The current school staff includes five full-day teachers, one full-time, half-day teacher (A.M. and P.M. sections) one half-time, half-day teacher (A.M.

section), and one extended-day teacher (A.M. and P.M. Sections). Itinerant, special area teachers visit the building to provide art, computer, library, music and physical education classes to the students. A part-time Title I reading specialist is in the building each day beginning at 10:30 A.M.. Four days a week, a special education teacher provides support services to one child with autism and one child with down syndrome. Two educational assistants provide instructional support and assistance to the teachers. Nursing services are provided on an emergency basis from the junior high or the closest elementary school and a certified school nurse visits the building for half a day each week. Additional staff members include one building secretary and one custodian. There are no cafeteria workers as hot meals are brought into the building from the junior high each day.

*Table 4.1: Demographic Information of Study Participants*

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Gender	Total Years Experience	Years Teaching Kindergarten	Years at MKS
Male	9		2
Male	18	4	3
Female	18		6
Female	8		4
Female	10	6	5
Female	20.5	20.5	6
Female	3	3	3
Female	4	3	3
Female	10	8	6
Female	12	7	6
Female	6	5	5
Female	7	6	6
Female	16	11	1
Female	17	6	5
Female	1	1	1
Male	35		

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## Results of Deductive Analysis

When the Star Center School District first took the idea of a kindergarten-only building idea to the public for debate, the Superintendent at the time claimed that the most important reason for establishing this setting was to provide an atmosphere of collaboration and collegiality not typically found in kindergarten. Cohen (1997) suggests that this willingness to promote collegiality is a mark of a strong organization. Document analysis of the PowerPoint presentation given at the public meeting, as well as several news articles written by local newspapers about the transition, all speak to the importance of creating opportunities for kindergarten teachers, who worked in isolation at the time, to collaborate. However, collaboration was never fully explained. Therefore, before I can determine if the research questions regarding the impact of collaboration have been fully answered, I must first examine the extent to which collaboration exists. Here, Welch's (1998) model will be used to evaluate how effectively the staff at Middleton Kindergarten School are able to collaborate. The model establishes six key areas that must be addressed for effective collaboration to occur. The key functions of collaboration are: Interactive exchange of resources, decision making, problem solving, conflict management, interpersonal communication, and systemic influences.

### *Interactive Exchange of Resources*

An interactive exchange of resources requires everyone to have ownership in the ideas being developed, revised and put into practice (Johnsen, 2006). Welch (1998) suggested that this element of collaboration is nothing more than sharing tangible and intangible resources to meet a common goal. In this setting, interactive exchange of resources consists of sharing tangible materials such as books, worksheets and audio

visual equipment. During observations, I documented nineteen times in which teacher's physically shared materials with one another. Typically, the sharing of resources was intended to provide the needed materials to complete a unit of study. Items such as books, worksheets, video tapes, extra copies of activities and craft materials were most often shared. However, when one teacher was working on a bulletin board promoting literacy through a specific author, two different teachers provided her with materials and book covers to add to the display. In another instance, one teacher provided several teddy bears to be used to promote the teddy bear picnic as they work on the letter T. It was noticed that the sharing of tangible resources was done freely and every classroom teacher participated by providing materials to another teacher who was in need.

The interview process also brought to light several instances of the importance of resource sharing to the school. When discussing the ways in which unit planning takes place, Raychel explained, "We were planning some activities to help students who were struggling with their printing...I remembered I had templates to use so I got those out for everybody." Other comments regarding the exchange of resources include:

They make copies for me and I make copies for them and we put them in each other's mailboxes. I know Samantha has these word family papers that she passes out... (Carolyn)

Well, with the librarian we would have a list of book titles that we wanted...and then she would provide us with those books and a list of other resources we could use. (Tim)

Usually we share materials, papers, puppets, you know, dice or whatever manipulatives – anything that we're using, we usually pass those on too. (Mary)

For example, copying something in the copy room and we see it and say, “That’s cute. Do you mind if I borrow that?” and they’ll copy one for everybody...

(Olivia)

It could be resources. I found this and a lot of times I’ll just walk into the meeting with one master copy of something for everybody. (Emma)

I make morning notes for me, Olivia, Raychel and Grace. I’ll give them the entire week’s worth on a Thursday and we’ll go over them together so we’re doing the same thing. I have them on my disk drive so it’s easy. (Samantha)

I have the Peterson font so, since we all are trying to use the same thing, I changed the letter assessment to the Peterson font rather than Comic Sans. I printed it out and gave the new assessment to everyone. (Rebekah)

I share occasionally during our staff meeting. For example, I showed everyone about the Reading A-Z website for them to use to get leveled books for the kids.

(Ali)

After forty-five minutes, they put together a whole packet of model lessons to use on the Smartboard. Directions, model lessons – just a whole packet of stuff they put together themselves. (Neal)

Anyone will come in and say, “I’m doing this and it worked great. Here’s a copy for everybody. (Grace)

I will sit and share some of my assessments and progress monitoring, but, for me, it’s more or less verbal communication on a daily basis. (Kit)

We borrow things. Like I just had kids bring down books from Mary and I sent something to Samantha and something to Rebekah today. So, we're constantly sharing things. (Nancy)

### *Decision Making*

Building a climate of collaboration requires the team to commit to shared decision making (Muller & Thorn, 2007). Decision making is a series of actions to reach a mutually defined goal and is a critical component of site-based management (Welch, 1998). With regard to decision making, I witnessed co-planning of activities, deciding on standard protocol for using hand held computers for literacy assessments, discussing the necessity of documenting handwriting progress the same way for reliability and then deciding upon the specific criteria, student progress, schedules and how to document information on a student record. These are just a sample of the thirty-six episodes of shared decision making that were documented through observations. Document analysis also provided evidence that the kindergarten building would allow for equitable instruction and activities because the teachers could decide, together, on what types of learning activities to develop, as well as targeted assemblies and field trips. Nancy expressed that collaboration happens when, "working together and talking about ideas and strategies that can be used in the classroom. We bounce things off of each other to see what the other teachers would do. We involve each other's opinions and work together to plan activities." Other comments regarding the decision making process as a collaborative exercise include:

I work with Emma so that we follow each other's schedule. She pre-teaches the letters before the regular classroom teachers so I follow her schedule for that because we share students. (Kit)

We talk about registration and different things how we're going to do it, what screenings we want to do, how are we going to manage the kids. They were just in here the other - thinking about that already. (Kayla)

Everybody thought, 'Oh, Miss So-And-So has all the answers.' But now some new blood has moved the kindergarten with their enthusiasm and creative thoughts. The teachers are getting on board and sharing these ideas. (Ralph)

The influence is that we figure out stuff together and then take it back. People share strategies of what works and what doesn't work. (Grace)

They talk around the (office) all the time. Someone will spark a topic and then two or three people will join in. Next thing you know, I'm taking notes... Things just kind of evolve that way. It happens several times a day. (Neal)

Because of my personal training and because we are focused on a child's needs, we share ideas about the progress of the children and decide how to meet the needs of the children. (Ali)

Samantha will ask me my opinion about what I would do in a certain situation or we'll email each other about what we want to do together. (Rebekah)

...Coming up with ideas. Simple things where you look at each other and say, "Oh yeah, that makes sense." The collaboration, I think is magnificent... we go over what we're doing with one another... what works, what doesn't work.

(Samantha)

We share kids so I have my time to sit down and talk with them so that they can tell me if the kids are coming in prepared or are they noticing something I need to change so that the kids don't fall behind. (Emma)

We bounce ideas off of each other and then we take off on it and we just move from topic to topic...we make the decision together. (Olivia)

We'll do our assessment and then we come together as a group to discuss and weight the option of moving a child to extended day or not. (Mary)

Because of my role as a teacher and a reading specialist, I was often consulted on several different levels. "Am I doing this right?" (Tim)

If I had an idea, everyone was willing to listen and then put their ideas together.

Then we would pick what we decided to do. (Carolyn)

A good give and take of ideas...we get together and really talk about what we are going to do to help kids...we come up with the ideas together. (Raychel)

### *Problem Solving*

The third component of effective collaboration is problem solving. This is very similar to decision making in that the participants worked together to come to a conclusion, resolve a problem or meet an established need (Welch, 1998). Collaboration allows teachers to solve problems while they are still manageable (Muller & Thorn, 2007). In many cases, the end result of problem solving is a concise decision. Therefore, I looked to problem solving as a process rather than an end result. A review of artifacts demonstrates a keen awareness of the problem solving benefits associated with the development of the kindergarten building. The superintendent at that time saw a need to bring the divergent curriculum delivery together in a focused, targeted manner. The

rewriting of the curriculum required problem solving as teachers from differing backgrounds and experiences were brought together to develop a reading curriculum that utilized the research of the National Reading Panel which changed the way the early literacy skills would be taught. Teachers were asked to develop lessons together that would focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. This was a paradigm shift from the more socially-oriented, arts and crafts type of kindergarten practices that were happening at Star Center School District in the past.

In addition to the problem solving that occurred when Middleton Kindergarten School was first opened, I observed several examples of problem solving in the everyday interactions of the teachers. When one teacher returned from a lengthy absence, she turned to her colleagues for assistance in learning the new hardware and software that they would use to give the DIBELS assessment. In another example, Olivia was having difficulty navigating the internet looking for resources and Mary sat with her and talked her through the search step-by-step until she was successful. During a staff meeting to review a new piece of technology used to assess students, Rebekah, who had taken the time to practice with the tools, began to demonstrate the proper techniques used with the hardware. Although Rebekah was not intended to be the presenter that morning, she took over and provided support to her colleagues so that they could solve the problems they were encountering. During my observations, I was able to document twenty-eight instances of problem solving among the participants. In most cases, the collaboration revolved around a teacher requesting help with technology from another participant who is more technology savvy. Other incidents included working together to change the art teacher's schedule due to a two hour snow delay that morning. Also, teachers were

observed discussing how they would approach a parent to discuss a difficult instructional matter regarding their child. Olivia spoke to how the problem solving occurs with regard to sharing the work to get a job completed:

We work together. One person will say, 'I'll type up the announcement that goes home to parents', then another will say, "I'll do this part", "I'll do that part", we basically delegate without having one person say, "You need to do this and you need to do that." We each take turns or do what it is that needs to be done.

Samantha explained that certain teachers have taken on problem solving roles within the staff: "If you have a computer problem you go to either Mary or Grace. If you need to make a schedule change you go to Rebekah." Other comments that support collaboration through problem solving include:

We have the kind of rapport with each other that we can say, "You know I tried this and it didn't work very well" and the others will help me figure out a better way to do it. (Mary)

We really are able to put together the ideas and split the work so that something gets done. Everyone stepped up to the plate to figure it out. (Tim)

...Not so much collaborative planning as it is, like, working as a team to meet each kids' individual need. What do I see them struggling with and what does Olivia see them struggling with? Then we put a plan together for the kids.

(Emma)

When we do our assessments – where are your kids compared to my kids? Do you think I should re-teach that? How can I approach this in a different manner?

(Samantha)

...You want to help. I want to, like, one of my personality characteristics is that I want to help everybody. (Rebekah)

If you think about the child and put the child as our main focus, it breaks down every barrier. We're doing the best, we're both working together for the betterment of the child. (Ali)

I was really impressed that they were able to come together without any direction or, uh, leadership from me for the most part. They'll decide how they want to handle something and then come to me. (Neal)

...A lot of times for myself and Olivia and Emma – we have the lower reading kids so it's great to talk to the full-day teachers and discuss how they approach something or how can we improve this in reading or writing... (Grace)

It was a shame that, before, you could tell if a kid went to this elementary school because he's weak in these skills... Well, you can't have that. There's no difference in the kids from the different elementary schools. They both deserve the best we can give them and the only way that that can happen is through consistency. The consistency at Middleton is because of the collaboration. (Ralph)

I'm included because I'm the one who has to talk to all of the parents about what's going on... I think that way everybody hears the same thing when they plan the activities. (Shalynn)

When it's academic, concerning ways to help your kids, there's a lot of collaboration. We touch base almost every day about what types of behaviors we're seeing and we talk about academics as well and she'll ask me questions about how to help him. (Kit)

Well, I think if I have a student who is either a behavior problem or academic needs or, like, a gifted child, I'm able to get ideas and get strategies from other teachers how to work with those kids, like what to do and just ideas. (Nancy)

### *Conflict Management*

Problem solving is also closely related to conflict management. Welch (1998) suggested that conflict occurs when one person perceives that another is interfering with his or her goal attainment. For the purposes of these results, I am demonstrating personal interactions and solving issues on a personal level rather than abstract problem solving of teaching strategy or behavior management. Scribner et al (1999) describe conflict management as the ability to embrace diverse views which is fundamental to the collaboration process. However, teachers who typically work in isolation typically have few conflict management skills (Welch, 1998).

Possibly because the teachers did not want to air their personal concerns in front of me, I was only able to witness two minor episodes of conflict management amongst the staff. One example was when Rebekah, who they often tease about sticking to a calendar, was late to a meeting. When she arrived, Mary began to sing, "I love, I love, I love, I love my calendar girl." In the other incident, the teachers were redesigning the day's schedule to try to accommodate one teacher. Raychel was not being flexible which caused an overlap in the music teacher's schedule for the day. The music teacher turned to Nancy and asked if she could just double –up the classes. Nancy responded in disgust, "I don't care what you do as long as I get my prep time. I don't care." It seemed obvious that Nancy wasn't happy with the concession, yet this wasn't worth arguing about.

Perhaps Raychel provided the best insight into their ability to manage conflict when she said,

I don't want to paint too rosy a picture like it's just glowing, because we do have things we have to work through. But, you know, the climate is such and the caring is such that we're willing to make an effort to do that. That's like any relationship... We are all family, but we're all professional enough to want to set aside those things for the good of the kids. If something would be such a negative that it would be hurting the kids we would want to get past that. But, you know it's just like any other family, even a good one, there's a little dysfunction. That's what makes it family.

Other evidence of conflict management became clear during the individual interviews:

Like a marriage, we've learned how to deal with conflict; we feel more comfortable sharing ideas and asking questions. Because we work together we've learned that we need to deal with problems as they arise because you're going to have to see that person tomorrow. (Olivia)

When a person wanted to hoard their ideas because they didn't want to lose credit, we just basically talked to her and showed her that she could still share and maintain the credit for the idea. I think teachers, I think are very possessive. Just teacher's personalities, we're all like, this is my room, these are my kids, this is my idea. When the comfort level increased, so did the sharing. (Tim)

Every once-in-a-while there's a little sisterly tiff, but we usually go back and say, "Hey, I'm sorry" or "I just was in a bad mood"... (Mary)

I think a lot of times we just talk to each other and we end up compromising in some way. There's a lot of times that I don't want to do whatever they're doing or don't understand why, but I just go along with it because everybody else wants to. It's okay. (Nancy)

I think they all get along better this year. They still have their moments, but I think they're talking more now. You know, they just don't hold on to it like before. (Kayla)

...there maybe were a couple of misunderstandings with someone...something got changed real quick and someone didn't know. But, pretty much, we didn't have any real problems. (Carolyn)

I thought the initial infighting and so forth was healthy. I thought it was healthy because it was a recognition that things are changing...I guess people's feelings were hurt and toes were stepped on...I think that was a healthy part towards people realizing that there are different ways of looking at things. (Ralph)

There's no resentment, but it is funny because, for the most part, we're all really, really perfectionists and so a lot of times would want things done our way and so we'll just do it ourselves because we want it done a certain way. (Grace)

They are very good at resolving things between one another...they are very good at handling things themselves. I think that speaks highly of them. (Neal)

...just disagreements, like doing it a way you wouldn't. Like family, it happens and it's gone. It's nothing serious. (Rebekah)

...getting to know each other through the years. Knowing how people react to things. Knowing that every Thursday somebody's going to come in (to the meeting) grumpy... We go with the flow now. (Samantha)

It definitely requires some flexibility, cause I think everyone has their idea of how they want things to go. It takes a great deal of flexibility and you have to have an open mind... (Emma)

### *Interpersonal Communication*

The most evident collaborative interactions occur through interpersonal communication between teachers and staff. Developing the effective lines of communication within and outside of the collaborative relationships is important so that information can be shared openly and in a timely manner (Hollins & Townsend, 2003; Welch, 1998). Several teachers spoke of how well the staff interacts with each other, but they also acknowledge that this has taken the most time to develop. Later in this chapter, I will discuss how the data demonstrates a historical change in climate as the staff worked together over time and as the staff became more comfortable with their colleagues and the expectations of the district. However, the data demonstrates that now, after five complete years of development, interpersonal communication has become a key component to their success.

Interpersonal communication occurred daily. Often the communication was between two or three teachers at one time, but it was also observed with the entire staff working together. I observed several meetings of the entire staff together and it felt like a bee hive of activity. Several of the teachers were multi-tasking; participating in several conversations at one time. Teachers joked with one another, answered each other's

questions, helped each other with technology, exchanged materials and enjoyed a snack that was brought in for the meeting while still continuing through the meeting agenda. Also observed was a very fluid, natural atmosphere of sharing. Teachers would move from person to person, topic to topic offering input and moving again. Work related topics are often interjected with personal discussions.

Interpersonal communication indicates the ability to communicate effectively in a manner that displays personal comfort or friendliness toward others. Through observation, I was able to identify twenty-eight episodes of interpersonal communication. When one teacher returned from an extended absence, the entire staff called a “meeting”. However, the sole purpose of the meeting was to share bagels and juice and to allow each other to “catch up” with the teacher who was out. During a weekly meeting, the topic drifted to birthday celebrations and who would make the cake. One morning before school, I observed Nancy and Rebekah in a unique exchange. Rebekah was in the hallway hanging student work. Nancy was at her desk. Together they planned writing prompts, notes to go home to parents and discussed when to send the note home without ever making eye contact. In fact, they had to yell to each other to be heard. A building culture that promotes this light atmosphere for exchange is ripe for interpersonal communication. The teachers shared examples and reasons why interpersonal communication happens so freely at Middleton Kindergarten School:

I think that being here, with the personalities that we have here, that we...we're like a family. My friends are the girls at work. (Olivia)

When you really know people, when you've spent a lot of time with them, as we have spent a lot of time with each other, you really begin – there's a trust element that happens. (Raychel)

It feels pretty natural. It's nice to get together and touch base...it's really informal. Everybody is just chatting and sharing...We all have equal input...everyone here is pretty strong.(Emma)

Eight women in one room, we get gabbing sometimes. It's like, okay, back on task. But it's nice because we're close. We do things together. We go out as a group and we do things as a group. (Samantha)

We were in a meeting and they said, "let Rebekah be Rebekah." Like, we are family...It's neat that we all have different personalities but can come together. We make a good group. (Rebekah)

I think the ability to get along with others is key to good collaboration. (Ali)

Two of our youngest teachers here are best friends. They spend weekends shopping with each other, they and their husbands get together, they go to the gym after school together. (Neal)

We're pretty close down here...a lot of it is informally passing in the hall. A lot of us talk on the phone. I'll call somebody at night... (Grace)

Collaboration is creating a culture of exchange. Where, you know, "Hey, forget me, forget my ego, forget my pride. If I can improve and you can help me improve, I'm here to let that happen." (Ralph)

It's hard to break-in down here. I don't know the personalities yet. I think they feel like I'm intruding on them. (Kit)

Everyone made me feel comfortable...They're very welcoming. I would say that I've collaborated with at least one teacher every day that I've been here.(Carolyn)

We all get along pretty well. We talk in the mornings and then after school on bus duty each day. (Shalynn)

We've gotten to know each other so well right now...it's taken a long time to develop that. I think it's definitely progressed. (Nancy)

I think...we're comfortable with each other and, you know, we know that we can share and if we don't have anything to share, that's okay too. (Mary)

It (collaboration) happens naturally. Some of it is casual. Some of it was lunchroom talk. I think it promotes collegiality. (Tim)

### *Systemic Influences*

The final component, systemic influences, speaks to the extent to which the organization promotes collegiality and collaboration. Welch (1998) explained systemic influence to be the formal systemic factors that are put in place to help meet specific goals. Schomberg (2003) stated that the administrative support for a collaborative climate is essential to promoting an atmosphere where staff members become instructional partners. Additionally teacher trust is undermined when administrators give verbal support to collaboration, but fail to provide the time and resources for the teachers to work together (McClure, 2008). Because collaboration has been said to be a significant reason for the development of the kindergarten building, I examined the data to find substantial proof that collaboration is nurtured and supported. A review of teacher schedules (See tables 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4) shows that teachers are provided with an additional one hour and twenty minutes of time before and after school. Students are

covered by educational assistants in the multi-purpose room so that teachers are free to meet, discuss and plan for their day.

*Table 4.2: Typical Half-Day Teacher's Schedule*

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8:15 - 9:00	Available For Collaboration
9:00 - 9:10	Morning Exercises
9:10 - 9:30	Calendar / Weather
9:30 - 9:50	Phonemic Awareness Activities
9:50 - 10:10	Special (Ms. Gamer Free)
10:10 - 10:30	Alphabet / Letter Recognition Activities
10:30 - 10:45	Writing Activities
10:45 - 11:00	Milk Break
11:00 - 11:20	Story Time / Reading
11:20 - 11:40	Math Activities
11:40 - 11:50	Clean-Up / Prep To Go Home
11:50 - 12:20	Lunch
12:30 - 12:40	Opening Exercises
12:40 - 1:00	Calendar / Weather
1:00 - 1:20	Phonemic Awareness Activities
1:20 - 1:40	Alphabet / Letter Recognition Activities
1:40 - 1:55	Writing Activities
1:55 - 2:10	Milk Break
2:10 - 2:30	Story Time / Reading
2:30 - 2:40	Free Play
2:40 - 3:00	Math Activities
3:00 - 3:10	Clean-Up / Prep To Go Home
3:10	Dismissal
3:10-3:45	Available For Collaboration

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*Table 4.3: Typical Full-Day Teacher's Schedule*


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8:15 - 9:00	Available For Collaboration
9:00 - 9:10	Morning Exercises
9:10 - 9:30	Calendar / Weather
9:30 - 9:50	Color / Shape / Counting Activities
9:50 - 10:10	Phonemic Awareness Activities
10:10 - 10:30	Rhyming / Sound Recognition
	Games And Songs
10:30 - 10:50	Alphabet / Letter Recognition
10:50 - 11:10	Letter Formation Art Projects
11:10 - 11:30	Story Time / Reading
11:30 - 11:50	Whole Class Writing Activity
11:50 - 12:20	Lunch
12:30 - 1:00	Nap
1:00 - 1:20	Speaking Activities
1:20 - 1:40	Special (Teacher Free)
1:40 - 2:00	Individual Writing Activities
2:00 - 2:15	Story Illustration
2:15 - 2:35	Math Activities
2:35 - 2:45	Math Manipulative Activities
2:45 - 3:00	Free Play
3:00 - 3:10	Clean-Up / Prep To Go Home
3:10	Dismissal
3:10-3:45	Available For Collaboration

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*Table 4.4: Typical Extended-Day Teacher's Schedule*


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8:15 - 9:00	Available For Collaboration
9:00 - 9:10	Morning Exercises
9:10 - 9:30	Calendar / Weather
9:30 - 9:50	Phonemic Awareness Activities
9:50 - 10:10	Alphabet / Letter Recognition
	Activities
10:10 - 10:30	Special (Teacher Free)
10:30 - 10:45	Writing Activities
10:45 - 11:00	Milk Break
11:00 - 11:20	Story Time / Reading
11:20 - 11:40	Math Activities
11:40 - 11:50	Clean-Up / Prep To Go Home

*Table 4.4 Typical Extended-Day Teacher's Schedule Continued*


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11:50 - 12:20	Lunch
12:30 - 12:50	Nap / Rest Time
12:50 - 1:10	Targeted Phonemic Awareness
1:10 - 1:30	Targeted Letter Recognition
1:30 - 1:50	Targeted Writing Activities
1:50 - 2:10	Story Time / Reading
2:10 - 2:30	Sanck / Free Play
2:30 - 2:50	Whole Class Writing Activity
2:50 - 3:00	Whole Class Choral Reading
3:00 - 3:10	Clean-Up / Prep To Go Home
3:10	Dismissal
3:10-3:45	Available For Collaboration

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The superintendent explained that he didn't see much value in just two or three meeting without the others being present so he asked the principal to arrange the teacher schedules to "buy" time so that they could all come together at the same time. As Middleton Kindergarten School opened the superintendent explained that, "As an administrator I think I had an obligation to give them the tools. You cannot give them the excuse of not having enough time to be a pitfall to collaboration. You have to provide that time."

Systemic influence to collaboration was observed in several ways. The first influence is the size of the building. The proximity of teachers to each other promotes a collaborative atmosphere. Also, the one-grade structure of the building ensures that teachers are all working on similar projects with a similar focus and target audience. The uniformity in assessment and curriculum delivery influences the collaboration in that all of the teachers are having similar experiences with materials and activities. In addition, the district wanted a unified approach to student activities, field trips and assemblies so that all students would receive equal educational opportunities.

Interviews also brought to light other systemic influences to their collaboration. Grace described it as, “the kindergarten culture. It’s so unique and unlike anything I’ve ever been a part of before.” Grace went on to describe how in other buildings where she had worked in the past, the teachers worked in isolation and that most discussions took place via email rather than face to face interaction. Carolyn and Nancy both pointed to fragmented staff in other settings in which they taught explaining that grade levels were divided between several schools making it difficult to meet as a staff. Other comments regarding systemic influences on collaboration are listed below.

Collaboration here is really easy because the staff is so small...we can just pop into rooms and grab people and do some problem solving. (Neal)

It’s really about meeting the needs of a child or students. Because this building is small enough, I can reach the other teachers easily as opposed to the other, bigger elementary schools where we were before. (Ali)

...this is only kindergarten in the building and all the teachers here only kindergarten teachers, there’s no other grades to deal with or anything like that.(Rebekah)

Down here, you know, we have all the same curriculum, we’re all teaching kindergarten and we’re all on the same page, more or less, and it’s nice to be able to say, “hey, do you have this ditto?” and they usually do. Where I used to teach, we didn’t have the time to meet. (Samantha)

Our standard time to meet is every Thursday morning. They were meeting weekly before I started here. It’s just us. Not the principal. (Emma)

Everybody's here by eight in the morning and we have until nine until class starts so we can cover a lot of ground in an hour. (Ralph)

...because this is a really unique situation with all of us together here in one grade. Now we are under the microscope. (Raychel)

You know, we all have basically the same curriculum; the same reading and math curriculum. So, you know, we are teaching the same skills and that gives direction to each classroom. This month we would really like to cover this. But, I think we have the freedom in each classroom to pursue that in the way we would like to pursue it. (Olivia)

We meet every Thursday to make sure everyone is on the same page. It's nice that kindergarten is all in one spot and they can meet and be on the same page and do the same thing and everyone knows what's going on. (Carolyn)

The teachers use the educational assistants to cover their rooms for snacks and naps for the all-day kids. This gives them more time to meet during the day.

(Kayla)

I don't think they are supposed to have the educational assistants copy things for them, but they are willing to. The assistants are supposed to help the kids first, but then help the teachers. I like to help them so they can do other things. (Shalynn)

The time for the extended-day teacher to meet with the special education teacher is important so they can reinforce the skills. That's an important time that's there.

(Kit)

At the beginning, when we first opened, I know they expected us to have a lot of collaboration...kind of consistently collaborate weekly. I think it was like an

understood thing...that's why we have Middleton so that the teachers can share ideas. One of the great things about this building is that we could collaborate so much. (Nancy)

What is different was that I didn't have another kindergarten teacher in the building to collaborate with. If I wanted to know what the other teachers were doing I'd have to either email, call or wait until in-service. (Mary)

One of the teachers in the district...said, "I have changed the way that I have taught and I've been teaching for over thirty years. What we're doing here has changed my thinking about my teaching." (Tim)

...the consistency of the instruction that's taking place. (Grace)

*Table 4.5: Framework Evidence Matrix*

Framework Principles	I	O	D
Exchange of Resources	x	x	x
Decision Making	x	x	x
Problem Solving	x	x	
Interpersonal Communication	x	x	
Systemic Influences	x	x	x

Note: I = Interview    O = Observation    D = Document Analysis

Given the wealth of observation, interview and document data that supports all six tenets of effective collaboration; it appears that the collaboration that occurs in the Middleton Kindergarten School is indeed highly effective. Teacher interactions, both formal and informal, meet a high standard of effectiveness with regard to sharing ideas, tangible resources, solving problems and managing conflict. Additionally, the comfortable relationship among these teachers points to strong interpersonal

communication. Further, the district has built a framework to support on-going collaboration and has expected and encouraged this atmosphere through schedule design, curriculum selection and overall building and grade level structure.

#### Results of Inductive Analysis

Now that it has been established that the daily formal and informal interactions of the Middleton Kindergarten School are, indeed, effective collaboration practices, I can use the data to answer the research questions of this study as well as to describe other important items that I have learned during this study. The research questions ask what effect the collaboration has had on the teaching and learning that happens in the building and how the current era of accountability have affected the nature of the collaboration in the building.

#### *Collaboration Effects on Teaching and Learning*

Bush (2003) contends that collaboration impacts the roles of teaching and learning as well as program administration and delivery. With regard to the first research question, three major themes emerged when discussing teaching and learning activities: (1) Improved teaching, (2) Expanded repertoire of teaching tools and activities, and (3) Continuity of curriculum and instruction.

#### *Improved Teaching*

The district committed to improving teaching and program delivery options as one reason for opening the kindergarten building. In May of 2003, during a public meeting to discuss the opening of the district kindergarten building, a PowerPoint slide presented by the superintendent listed “Improved Instructional Practices through collaboration” and “Expansion of Program Options” as two important positive changes

that Middleton Kindergarten would bring. After board approval, the first change that was presented to the parents was an option for full-day kindergarten and the administration provided for a screening protocol to qualify students into the extended-day program. The kindergarten building would open in August of 2003 with parents being able to choose the kindergarten program that best met their individual needs. The district administration had to address the divergent teaching and experiences of the staff that would take these new roles and the superintendent told me that the staff selection was, “a very deliberate and careful choice. We had to consider personality, background and expertise.”

Additionally, the district took the initial building staff and sent them to a kindergarten conference where they would be immersed in current instructional research and best practices for teaching this age group. Raychel, Tim and Samantha, all part of the original staff, spoke of the importance of attending that conference to create cohesion among the staff members as well as bringing improved teaching techniques to everyone. Raychel said, “That was intensive. That gave us the bones of what to do and then we were able to hang something on that...that was very important. Tim supported Raychel’s remarks with, “At the summer conference, we were given resources to improve our instruction, some current research with respect to learning the alphabet and sounds and putting them together to build words.” Finally, Samantha added, “That’s where we got the idea for the morning messages and that’s where I started my graphing. Now we all do that.” While all eight of the current kindergarten building teaching staff stated that the collaboration has made them a better teacher, several participants spoke about how the collaboration has impacted their teaching more directly:

I'm trying to get as many ideas as I can. I'm thinking of one child in particular who I'm trying to keep out of special ed. some day. I try to get as much support and ideas as I can to help him. (Ali)

Well, I think it enriches the learning because the more, you know, you have to share and the more you have to offer the students, it enriches them and enhances me. (Rebekah)

The enthusiasm and ideas of these young people pulled the older people into the fold. The exciting things that were happening in that particular classroom weren't kept to that classroom. The open, frank collaboration allowed exciting things to happen. (Ralph)

I think collaboration has helped to refine what we're doing. (Olivia)

We figure out what works and it's shared with everybody to take back to their classrooms and most of the time it does work. (Grace)

#### *Expanded Repertoire of Teaching Tools and Activities*

The other theme that became apparent was the expanding repertoire of activities and tools to be used in the classroom. Teachers were observed sharing activity pages and craft ideas on several occasions each day. One specific observation included a moment during a Thursday morning meeting where the teachers were discussing the idea of teaching polar animals. Samantha shared an activity where students could feel how blubber works to insulate polar animals. The activity included a hands-on experience where the children place their hands in ice water. Then they put on a "blubber mitt" which is essentially a glove covered in cooking shortening. Then, the students would put that hand in the ice water to experience how well the "blubber" kept the cold from the

water away from their hand. The teachers were excited to try this activity and saw it as an activity the whole school should complete to demonstrate this science topic. During his interview, Neal said, “The young teachers have from fresh ideas and the older teachers have a wealth of experiences...they pull from the experience of both of those...” Other participant comments included:

I think there’s more dynamic than just me by myself. I bring more things into the classroom because of that. (Nancy)

I’ve done some different activities that I would never have thought of before because I got those ideas with, you know, talking with the other teachers...I’ve found something different or a new way to approach it by being able to collaborate. (Mary)

It allows for improved instruction because they are sharing best practices. They talk about what works and what doesn’t. There is an equity that exists in the instruction that wasn’t there before. (Ralph)

I got a lot of ideas; everything from curriculum to theme ideas... sometimes people are reading different journals and seeing different things online that we all share. (Emma)

We’ve shared extra activities to do, like something simple that you wouldn’t even think of...so being able to say, “My kids are struggling with this. How would you teach this?” (Samantha)

New ideas...I grow, my instruction grows with our ideas. (Rebekah)

*Continuity of Curriculum and Instruction*

The last theme that emerged with regard to collaboration's relationship to teaching and learning is the continuity of curriculum and learning experiences that are planned for the students. The superintendent in 2003 spoke of isolationism of the kindergarten teachers and how two teachers next door to each other would often not be doing the same things. Mary talked of being the only kindergarten teacher in the building prior to opening the kindergarten building and how she was limited in her ability to talk to others. She either had to email, call or wait until an in-service day to get the opportunity to discuss what other kindergarten teachers were doing in their rooms. Observations of teachers creating schedules and calendars, planning field trips, organizing assessment protocol, developing craft ideas, sharing ideas for activities. In all, I observed sixty-one examples of idea sharing, material sharing and planning with the purpose of keeping everyone together and providing similar instruction to the kids.

All of the teachers agreed that the purpose of the collaboration was to maintain similar instruction, but that each of them has the flexibility to add their own style or ideas to the instruction. The teachers are not expected to be in lock-step with one another. Raychel says, "We're all trying to be doing about the same things so we're pretty much on target with the curriculum... There's continuity with what is taught from room to room. We're not all on the same page, but we're pretty close." Other participants also commented about the continuity:

We're constantly talking about what we're doing, what letters we're teaching, what kinds of skills we're working on in the classroom. (Kit)

They are pretty much all doing the same things which is good so the parents don't say this teacher did this, but not this one. (Shalynn)

Collaboration helps because everyone is on the same page and you're helping each other. (Carolyn)

One of the main ideas of all of this is that we wanted every child to have similar experiences. It doesn't matter what part of the district you are from, they each deserve a good experience. (Ralph)

Good strategies are promoted and things are incorporated into everyone's classroom. (Tim)

We all want to be doing about the same thing in the same chapter and the same unit and the same science or whatever. We all want to be doing about the same things, but I don't think we have to do it exactly. (Nancy)

### *Impact of Accountability on Collaboration*

When two professionals are delivering a quality learning experience, the odds of success are doubled and, the end result of good collaboration is overall improvement within the school (Schomberg 2003). In Pennsylvania one thinks of the Pennsylvania System of State Assessment (PSSA) tests are the accountability benchmark for students in grades three through eleven for math, reading, writing and science. One may also think that because kindergarten is not a tested grade that there is little attention given to these measures. However, the study produced three themes with regard to the effect of the era of accountability on teacher collaboration at Middleton Kindergarten School: (1) Focusing on the child, (2) Academic rigor, and (3) Accountability for performance.

*Focusing on the child*

Providing instructional equity is one theme that is constantly repeated in the documents surrounding the kindergarten building. The parent handbook explains that there is consistency within the curriculum regardless of their program choice. The principal in 2003 spoke to a local news reporter and said, “It doesn’t matter what program the parents choose, the learning experiences will essentially be the same.” Also, the superintendent’s PowerPoint presentation to the public described equitable experiences as a key reason to establish the kindergarten building. Additionally, he explained how the extended-day program would allow the teachers to provide individualized, early intervention so that the children would enter first grade on an “equal playing field”. I observed several times when the teachers worked together to ensure that the needs of a student or a group of students were being met. On one occasion Samantha, Olivia, Emma and Grace were sharing ideas on ways to help some of their children who struggle with counting numbers above ten. Kit and Nancy were observed as they conferenced with each other to discuss the overall success of a student’s behavior program. During this conversation, they established new behavior goals for this student. Rebekah asked Mary for her opinion with how to respond to a child’s physical “ticks” that he is displaying in class and for advice for approaching the issue with the parent. Ali and Raychel met to discuss the reading progress of a student that they share. Ali provided Raychel with several ideas to help to expand the student’s letter recognition and sight word vocabulary.

During the interview Process, Ali spoke of the school’s focus, “The general focus of this school is the child. You have to think about the child and what’s best for him. That’s our main focus.” Kayla also said that the main focus of the building was, “. . .a

combination of the kids and instruction.” and Shalynn added that, “the teacher’s don’t worry about much as long as the kids are taken care of.” Other data that was uncovered during the interviews supports the focus on the child:

I...really work with the kids to be sure that they know – so that they get to first grade prepared. (Kit)

We’re always talking about kids. Talking about and say, “This student needs this. I have these concerns about him.” (Emma)

We’re trying to focus on things that are going to be beneficial for the kids now and down the road. (Nancy)

We talk about, “Here are these kids. Why are they here? How can we move them?” (Tim)

The focus now is for the kids to learn through experiences that are fun. The kids are ready to learn, they’re eager to read and that’s our focus now. (Ralph)

We’ve set some goals, things that we think need to see in children for success. (Raychel)

I’m thinking of this one girl with a low DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) and I’ll ask the others what they would do to help her. (Grace)

We dwell more on, umm, seeing to it that the kids can read and write and have those foundations in place. (Neal)

I have this one that I’m really worried about. I’ve asked the speech therapist and Title I teacher to observe him and give me some ideas. I’m not sure I want him to move to extended-day just yet. (Samantha)

We need to know what our kids' needs are and we have to prepare the students to meet that challenge. (Olivia)

We all know the kids and they are comfortable with all of us. (Mary)

### *Academic Rigor*

The instruction at the kindergarten level has changed since the kindergarten building opened. Again, the original staff was sent to a conference to reinforce the requisite skills that need to be taught in a balanced literacy classroom. The conference opened a lot of eyes to the impact of a rigorous kindergarten curriculum. Prior to the building's formation, it was noted that the teachers taught in isolation and were doing their own things with little specific direction on what or how to teach. Tim called this a paradigm shift moment where the teachers had to move from free play to purposeful play and from having a story read to them and drawing a picture to learning the skills to read the story themselves. Documents demonstrate that one dramatic change was the new registration procedures that were put into place. For the first time, students were included in the process and screened for vision, hearing, speech and pre-reading skills. These screenings, especially in the case of reading skills, established the first time the instruction would have baseline data from which to teach.

It is difficult to establish how frequently rigor was a topic of observed interactions because the curriculum is well established and the observed collaboration was typically more focused on activities and resources to maintain rather than improve the programs or increase rigor. However, Tim, Raychel, Mary, Samantha and Nancy were all members of the original staff which had the task of developing the new curriculum. The original teachers reflected on how much work had to be done, through collaboration, to change

what they teach. The teachers talked about how they had to pool their resources to develop activities. It was noted that they all taught handwriting differently, they all had different expectations for math; one focused only on shapes, colors and numbers while another was integrating graphs daily. In reading, each teacher taught the letters in different orders making it impossible to teach word families because the vowels were not taught in the same sequence.

Tim, a teacher with a reading specialist certificate, was used as a coach to help establish better practices in the instruction: “I would go in and model best practices for the teachers and then I would visit again and observe the teachers working with the kids in reading and then we would conference to discuss what changes needed to be made.”

Other views of academic rigor came to light during the interview process:

We have established a list of competencies we have to meet. (Ali)

We definitely want these kids reading before they leave the building. (Kit)

Our report card is basically what we want them to be able to accomplish. For me, I want them to be able to read. We give them sight word sentences at the end of the year, we have a packet of fifteen or twenty sentences, that they should read with confidence. (Emma)

We’re more academically directed. We’re not constantly doing art projects with this...we focus on things that help the kids in math and reading. (Nancy)

No longer can we exist and be competitive with other districts without collaboration. (Ralph)

The curriculum that we use has set goals to meet the standards. We felt our children could do a little bit more than what the curriculum was giving. (Raychel)

We use broader vocabulary. Not just naming words – nouns. We say action words are verbs. We do problem solving each day in math. (Samantha)

Our children are already learning about skills that they're going to need in order to have good scores on the PSSA's. We've started to work on idioms already.

(Olivia)

We build the foundation that the kids need to do well on the PSSAs. (Mary)

We've pushed this model to its limits. We've seen what these kids can do when they walk out of here and I'm very satisfied with what the kids can do when they leave... They're very well prepared for the first grade. (Neal)

We're constantly assessing them. (Rebekah)

#### *Accountability for Performance*

The standard thinking before Middleton Kindergarten School opened, was that kindergarten worked in anonymity. Ralph and Raychel both make mention that very little attention was paid to the curriculum, learning activities and teaching tactics at the kindergarten level. Now, the evidence that the teachers feel accountable for student success is overwhelming. Raychel uses the term, "under the microscope" to describe the feeling she has. Ralph says there is greater attention paid to kindergarten work. Many of the teachers also recognize that the public is looking not just to the success of their child, but to the continuity of the instruction. They feel pressure from the parents to participate in special activities or to complete certain crafts because parents are constantly comparing them.

During the hours of observations, one of the recurring topics was how their students would perform on the upcoming Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy

Skills (DIBELS) assessment. At the kindergarten level, DIBELS is used to measure phonological awareness, alphabetic principal and fluency (University of Oregon, 2008). Students are tested in letter naming fluency which assesses the total number of letters a child can identify randomly in a one minute period, initial sound fluency assess the child's skill at identifying and producing the initial sound of a given word, and nonsense word fluency is the ability of the child to demonstrate letter-sound correspondences as well as their ability to blend the letters together to form nonsense words. The teachers were being trained on using hand held computers to complete the assessment and they wanted to master its use so that they were consistent in their delivery. The teachers explain that DIBELS results are an important measure to predict later reading proficiency.

Additional observations of teachers feeling accountable were in the planning of special activities such as polar animal day. While not all teachers have dedicated the time to teach polar animals as others had, they all felt that their students had to be prepared to participate in the day's key activities around penguins and polar bears. The teachers debated what were the key learnings that they wanted their students to know and what activities would they use to demonstrate the instruction. Several times it was mentioned that the parents would want their children to participate in all the activities.

Teachers have become accustomed to using data to drive their instruction. One example is the use of DIBELS as a screening that the teachers use. Tim added,

We keep data, we are getting better at not only keeping in, but interpreting it and using it to drive instruction... We only have 180 days to mold and shape these kids. They all moved. Some farther than others, but you can see their growth.

The teachers feel more pressure for their students to perform and to be prepared for first grade. Since the development of the kindergarten building, the teachers feel accountable for the success of their students:

We work hard to prepare them to go on to first grade. We're effected in a different manner. Maybe not directly by the PSSA, but indirectly. We're always assessing the students and looking for ways to help them improve. (Rebeksh)

We dwell on, umm, seeing to it that the kids can read and write. They're very well prepared for the first grade curriculum. (Neal)

I don't think we feel the pressure that some of the other grades feel for the PSSAs. I do want them reading sentences and questions and even writing them by the end of the year. (Mary)

We talk about the PSSA and we bring them up to the parents. 'These kids have to know this for the PSSA.' Like, we're problem solving, doing idioms and working on personal connections now. (Samantha)

I guess with the PSSAs we assess everything now. We actually talked about assessing, for example how long can a kindergartener sit still. (Carolyn)

We're always thinking what are we assessing, when are we going to assess this. I worry about where they will be in third grade so I have to have them to a certain point before they leave me. (Grace)

We've set some goals for what children should be able to do. At a certain point in the year there's an urgency to see certain things happening because we've been through it now. We know what they should be accomplishing and able to do. (Raychel)

Areas of weaknesses can be fixed and that only happens through collaboration and what teachers value in terms of what should be taught has changed. (Ralph)

They have to be ready for the PSSA and there are things that I know I have to really work on with the kids to get them ready. (Kit)

“All the competencies have to be met. (Ali)

We make more effort for the students to master skills rather than just introducing skills. I think we push a little bit harder knowing what they’re going to have to master in order to succeed. (Olivia)

*Table 4.6: Emerging Theme Evidence Matrix*

Themes	I	O	D
Improved Instruction	x	x	
Expanded Resources	x	x	x
Continuity of Curriculum	x	x	x
Child Focus	x	x	x
Academic Rigor	x	x	
Accountability for Performance	x	x	x

Note: I = Interview    O = Observation    D = Document Analysis

Although answers to frequently asked questions about the district’s kindergarten programs that are posted on the district website state that the all-day kindergarten is not intended to move first grade curriculum into kindergarten, the age of accountability has created an academic push-down where kindergarten is the new first grade. Kindergarten is no longer social building or art class. Ralph described a time when he witnessed teachers reading a book then the kids would go to their desk and color a picture about the book. Now the teachers are accountable for students to meet certain benchmarks. Ralph put it this way:

Times have changed dramatically. I mean their experiences in life from video games to vacations to travel to things that they're exposed to. The school doesn't have to do the socialization anymore. They are ready to learn...it doesn't have to be painful.

And Nancy added, "We're teaching a lot more content than before, but everything is taught through fun activities. The kids are having fun."

Given vast amount of data collected through artifact review, observations, and interviews, it can be determined that collaboration has a significant impact on the teaching and learning that occurs at Middleton Kindergarten School. The data demonstrates an emergence of better teaching, an expanded repertoire of teaching tools and continuity of curriculum and practices. Also, the data demonstrates that the era of accountability has directed the collaboration toward a child-centered focus, academic rigor, and professional accountability for student performance.

#### Other Results

During data analysis, two important factors came to light: the historical perspective of the collaborative process and the efficacy of Middleton Kindergarten School. I will take the opportunity to briefly describe these other findings.

##### *Historical Perspective*

The doors of Middleton Kindergarten School opened officially in August of 2003. During the prior May, the school administration presented the idea to consolidate the kindergarten program from three, isolated schools where teachers had divergent approaches to teaching to one kindergarten only building where a collaborative atmosphere would encourage collegiality and collaboration. During that summer, staff

was selected for the first year. The first staff consisted of two teachers who had only kindergarten teaching experience. The other teachers had kindergarten experience, but were currently teaching in other areas: one teacher who was moving in from first grade, one from second grade, one reading specialist, and one new hire. The teachers were sent to a summer kindergarten institute to attempt to put them on the same page.

However, what was neglected was the development of a team concept. The teachers all moved to the building from other district schools and had limited opportunities to meet as a group prior to the beginning of the school year. While they were all willing and prepared to work together, they were not prepared for the dynamics of team building. Tuckman (2001) established a sequence which newly formed teams experience as they grow: (1) Forming where the new team members orient themselves to each other. (2) Storming where there is resistance to group influence and requirements. (3) Norming where members begin to open to other group members. (4) Performing where the team becomes functional and group action is constructive. And (5) Adjourning where there is anxiety about team separation or termination.

Four of the five original teachers were interviewed for this study. One had retired and was unwilling to participate. However, all of the others made it clear that it took several years for them to build the trust and rapport to make their collaboration efficient. Egos, inflexibility, control and mistrust were all barriers that had to be broken before good collaboration could flourish. Raychel said, “We were given lots of time to meet and the expectation for collaboration was there, but you can’t just put five people together and tell them to collaborate. There has to be trust first.” This would indicate that the team

experienced Tuckman's (2001) sequence of team development with very little assistance from district or building administration.

Middleton Kindergarten School has grown to include a total of eight classroom teachers and a reading specialist. With the growth of personnel has come a building of trust and understanding of team concept. This has occurred naturally because the district did not offer assistance or in-servicing on how teams organize. It would have been prudent for the district to offer this training so that the team members could have seen that they were going through the typical stages of building an effective team rather than feeling, in the early years, like they were dysfunctional as a group of professionals.

### *Efficacy*

The other theme that became clear, especially when reviewing student assessment data, is how effective Middleton Kindergarten School is at preparing students to meet local curriculum standards and to set the groundwork for future success. Kindergarten students are given the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills assessment during January and again in May of each year. They are assessed in four key areas that are considered to be excellent predictors of later reading proficiency (University of Oregon, 2008). The students are assessed in their ability to identify random letters in the alphabet (letter naming fluency); their ability to identify and produce the initial sound of a given word (initial sound fluency); their ability to produce individual sounds within a given word (phoneme segmentation fluency); and their ability to make letter-sound correspondences and their ability to blend letters together to form unfamiliar or nonsense words (nonsense word fluency). Table 4.7 demonstrates the percentage of Middleton Kindergarten School students that scored above the assessment benchmarks in each

category. Data was not available for the first two years of the kindergarten school's existence. Additionally, PSSA assessment data for the 2003-2004 and the 2004-2005 kindergarten cohort demonstrates that these students scored well above the state assessment targets in their third and fourth grade years. Table 4.8 shows the percentage of students who scored in the proficient and/or advanced range in reading and math.

*Table 4.7: Percent of Students Reaching DIBELS Benchmarks*

Cohort	ISF	LNF	PSF	NWF
2008-2009	74	92	95	91
2007-2008	85	93	98	94
2006-2007	73	87	95	92
2005-2006	74	89	96	91

Note: ISF = Initial Sound Fluency  
 PSF = Phoneme Segmentation Fluency  
 LNF = Letter Naming Fluency  
 NWF = Nonsense Word Fluency

*Table 4.8: Percent of student's Earning Proficient or Advanced on PSSA*

Cohort	Reading (PA Benchmark)	Math (PA Benchmark)
2003-2004		
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	80 (54)	96 (45)
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	80 (63)	92 (56)
2004-2005		
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	86 (63)	94 (56)

Students perform well on the DIBELS assessment and they far exceed state targets on the PSSA when they reach third and fourth grade. Additionally, the safe schools reports show just two incidents of student violence in the five plus years of existence. The district is the recipient of several students who have special needs from the intermediate unit early intervention programs. However, since the development of the

kindergarten school and the extended-day program that provides early intervention, just five additional children have been placed in special education after kindergarten.

Furthermore, twenty-eight students have been exited from the Title I reading program.

## CHAPTER V

## DISCUSSION

## Introduction

Collaboration is generally thought of as a positive dynamic that can occur in an organization. In schools, collaboration is most often related to team teaching, project based unit planning, student/teacher interactions, and inclusion (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2001; Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2007; Welch, 1998). Collaboration provides an opportunity for teachers to improve their instructional practices while gaining differing perspectives from others (Kremenitzer & Myler, 2006). While Welch (1998) suggests that collaboration is often thought of as teachers getting along with one another, Hollins and Townsend (2003) add that good collaboration is characterized by mutual trust and respect while working to achieve a common goal.

Through a case study of Middleton Kindergarten School, I have gained valuable insights into the formal and informal collaborative practices that occurred among the teachers on a daily basis including how collaboration has affected the teaching and learning in the building as well as how the era of accountability has influenced the nature of collaboration that occurs. To inform the study of collaboration, I have used a specific framework, derived from Welch (1998), to establish the existence of effective collaboration that includes an interactive exchange of resources, shared decision making, mutual problem solving, conflict management, interpersonal communication and systemic influences.

Case study was used to investigate the collaboration at Middleton Kindergarten School. The kindergarten only building has five full-day sections, three half-day sections,

and two extended-day sections. The combination of program choice and housing all district kindergarten students in one building create a unique setting for the study. Over a period of two months, I engaged sixteen participants in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Additionally document analysis and observations lent insight into the case which was informed by collaboration theory. Trustworthiness of the data was promoted through triangulation, member checking and peer review.

In this chapter I will share an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of the collaboration at Middleton Kindergarten School. My analysis will include a discussion of the theoretical backdrop and the emerging themes in the data as they relate to the research questions. Also, I will fully describe two additional themes that surfaced as part of this study: the historical perspective of the development of a collaborative atmosphere and the overall efficacy of the building's programs. Study limitations will be discussed and the implications of this study for future research and practice will be explored.

### Collaboration

The idea of creating an atmosphere of collegiality, cooperation and collaboration was the primary intent of the Star Center School District's superintendent when he first proposed the idea of opening Middleton Kindergarten School. He expressed his disappointment at how fragmented the early childhood instruction had become in the district and noted that one teacher taught through songs, others read books aloud to students who then completed an art project to illustrate what they had learned. It was realized that curriculum pacing and rigor varied greatly from classroom to classroom and that the teachers taught in isolation; rarely in contact with their colleagues. The concept of establishing a collaborative atmosphere was the catalyst for the development of this

model. While this case study demonstrates impressive data that demonstrates a positive, collaborative atmosphere, this is but a snapshot of the kindergarten building's growth. Later in this chapter, I will discuss the historical perspective that brought this building to where it is today.

Several key principles of collaboration were examined through this case study. The first tenant of collaboration, interactive exchange of resources, involves the sharing of tangible and intangible resources. The sharing of tangible materials was, perhaps, the easiest collaborative exercise to observe and document. On a daily basis, teachers and staff were observed sharing copies, video tapes, books, craft supplies, instructional materials and manipulatives. Teachers spoke of how frequently they would find an activity on the internet or in a magazine and make copies for everyone on the team to use. Additionally, teachers and staff also explained that they would frequently see another teacher preparing a lesson and would ask permission to duplicate the idea in their classroom.

Intangible resources such as power and ideas were also shared. Both Emma and Grace said that the teachers work on a level playing field and that everyone has equal input when they are planning. Kayla and Shalynn also expressed that the teachers also value the opinions of non-teaching staff members. It was noted that the staff members were empowered to lead in different areas as well. Kayla is best with interacting with parents, Rebekah controlled the building schedule, Samantha promoted a weekly agenda and collected project ideas that she brought to the weekly meetings, both Mary and Grace were leaders in technology, and Raychel was known for helping others work through their problems.

Decision making requires input from varied stakeholders as they work towards a common goal. Teachers make many decisions each day and effective collaborators invite others to share in this process. As a team, the teachers made decisions regarding daily schedule changes, program development, learning activities and individual student needs. Each Thursday the entire team meets to discuss a shared agenda that includes topics such as special instructional activities such as Read Across America Day, Hat Day, 100 Day, Polar Animal Day and the Teddy Bear Picnic. Each activity required the input of the team as they developed specific learning activities in which they all would participate. These examples demonstrate the idea of equitable instruction that the superintendent hoped would be a result of developing Middleton Kindergarten School.

The extended-day teacher and the special education teacher worked closely with the classroom teachers to make educational decisions for the children that they supported. On a large scale, behavior modification plans and Individual Education Plans are a collaborative, decision making effort. However, the teachers also worked closely to make daily decisions based on immediate student needs.

Problem solving is closely related to decision making in that a solution or final decision must be made. However, for the purposes of this study, I examined the process of problem solving rather than the end result. On a large scale, the collaborative efforts of the staff worked to establish a targeted curriculum delivery system rather than the former fragmented instruction that was occurring prior to the opening of the kindergarten building. On a smaller scale teachers provided each other assistance to master new technology, find teaching resources, share teaching strategies for a special needs child,

prepare for parent conferences, and ensuring conformity in their system of grading children.

Conflict management involves the team's ability to work through issues that interfere with the overall goal. In most cases, conflict management entails working through personal issues. Perhaps it is this reason that the teachers were careful not to discuss their personal circumstances and problems in my presence. On two occasions, however, I observed teachers deal with conflict in different ways. One teacher used humor to deescalate a situation when the entire staff was waiting on one person to start a meeting. In the other situation, one teacher simply agreed to be flexible in a situation where her non-verbal communication clearly demonstrated that she wasn't happy with having to change her plans to help another. The participating teachers also recognized that they have learned to talk through their disagreements. Olivia's perspective was that they needed to work through their problems because they work so closely each day. Teachers likened conflict management in their setting to a family that has to take ownership of the situation, resolve their issues in a civilized manner and then move forward. Raychel told me that she is very sensitive to the other's feelings and senses an obligation to help others resolve their disputes and Neal acknowledged that the team is good at resolving their conflicts without administrative input.

One reason the teachers are able to resolve conflict so efficiently is the overwhelming evidence of interpersonal communication. The teachers demonstrated a very comfortable demeanor and genuine care for each other. Conversation between staff members would change fluidly from work to personal and back again. In one instance, the teachers made an effort to celebrate the return of a colleague from an extended

absence. Also, the teachers plan monthly cake days to celebrate each other's birthdays. It was noted that many have close relationships outside of work while teachers talking of shopping together, exercising together, and sharing family time with each other. The teachers often referred to themselves as family who really know and trust each other.

The district has been supportive of the collaboration that occurs in this model. System influence demonstrates the extent to which the organization promotes collaboration. The building itself is a systemic influence on the collaboration because of the close proximity of the teachers each day. Having just one grade level in the building is another influence to the collaboration. From the beginning, the superintendent wanted to develop an atmosphere where the entire staff could interact on a daily basis. Therefore, the schedules were developed to allow for additional time before and after the student's instructional day. Utilizing paraprofessionals and creative scheduling to care for students in the mornings and at dismissal, the district was able to create an extra hour and twenty minutes of time that is available for teacher collaboration. The staff calls this the kindergarten culture where they can easily meet, share ideas and develop strategies based on the design of the model. Several teachers acknowledge that they were unable to share ideas in previous settings where only one or two teachers worked together. Having the entire grade level in one building with a unified approach to instruction and time to meet has promoted collaboration at Middleton Kindergarten School.

It can be concluded that collaboration occurs on a high level at Middleton Kindergarten School. Evidence of sound collaborative exercises was documented in all six tenants of Welch's model through interviews, observations and document analysis. Formal and informal daily interactions of decision making, problem solving and conflict

management reach a high level of effectiveness. However, this is a snapshot in time and the participants acknowledge that this atmosphere did not exist immediately upon the building's opening in 2003. This will be discussed in more detail later.

#### Research Question #1

The first research question to be examined asks how does collaboration influence the overall teaching and learning environment at a building dedicated to the instruction of kindergarten students. As a result of the case study, I have identified three major themes that emerged from the data to demonstrate the influence collaboration has on the teaching and learning: Improved teaching; expanded repertoire of teaching tools and activities; and continuity of curriculum and instruction.

One of the major reasons for opening Middleton Kindergarten School was to improve the instructional delivery and to provide early intervention services to the district's youngest learners. The superintendent hoped that the collaboration would result in improved practices, curriculum alignment, and an increase in the use of scientifically based teaching pedagogy. He expected that the influx of new teaching staff would assist other teachers to expand their instructional practice by injecting new ideas into their teaching. A systemic influence to this approach was to send the entire staff to a kindergarten conference the summer before the building opened to gain new perspective into early literacy and math instruction. Teachers reflected that they are better teachers now because they have the opportunity to gain from the experiences of others, have been able to refine their teaching from the input of others, and have utilized ideas they may have never thought of in their previous setting.

The constant sharing of tangible and intangible resources has led to an expanded repertoire of teaching tools and activities that benefits all of the teachers and all of the students. Each member of the staff has unique ideas and “pet projects” that have been shared with the other teachers. As a result, the students are exposed to a focused curriculum that promotes student achievement beyond expectation. The staff can pull from the fresh ideas of some while honoring the experiences of others as they navigate the exchange of ideas that occurs. As such, teachers are now exposed to a wealth of materials and resources that they can use from year to year. Teachers express that their teaching is more dynamic due to the wealth of materials that are available to them and that they have done many activities with their children that they would not have considered had they not had others sharing with them.

Both the teachers and administrators agree that a common theme of the collaboration is to maintain consistency between the classrooms. Students should benefit equally from their kindergarten experience regardless of their teacher. As the superintendent proposed the kindergarten school, he recognized that students from the different settings were each receiving very different instruction and leaving kindergarten with varied experiences and levels of preparedness for first grade. A key factor in the development of this model was to create continuity in the curriculum and the instructional practices so that each child had equal opportunities. The teachers noted that everyone is on the same page and while they do not all teach exactly alike, their daily activities and instruction are similar. According to Tim, the good strategies emerge and become part of the instruction.

## Research Question #2

The second research question asked how the current era of accountability and reform influenced the nature of the collaboration in a building dedicated to the instruction of kindergarten students. As a result of the analysis of data collected through interviews, observations and document review, three themes became apparent: Child-centered focus; academic rigor; and accountability for teacher performance. The emergence of these themes demonstrate how the accountability era (No Child Left Behind) has influenced the nature of collaboration that occurs at Middleton Kindergarten School.

The collaboration that exists at the kindergarten school has a singular focus: the child. The collaborative practices target equity for all the children regardless of their gender, socio-economic background, or previous learning experiences. This was a goal of the district when designing the kindergarten school model that currently exists. On several occasions, teachers were observed sharing ideas and resources to assist one child or a group of children understand a concept. Student behavior plans and individual education plans were frequently discussed between the special education teacher and the classroom teachers. The goal of the building is to move children and prepare them for their future education and the teachers all made mention of maintaining a focus on the child's needs when collaborating, planning and teaching. The staff looks to individual and group needs as they plan activities. The teachers seek advice of specialists in speech, reading and special education to attempt to meet the child's needs.

Another result of the influence of accountability has been the increase of rigor at the kindergarten level. While the district claimed on their website that creating the kindergarten school would not be used to push down the first grade curriculum, the

revised kindergarten curriculum, and resulting collaboration, has become more focused on literacy and math instruction. The teachers acknowledged that they have changed the way they teach to a more scientifically based instructional model – especially in reading. A literacy coach provided the staff with instructional strategies for the first two years the building existed as a kindergarten building. The teachers also describe how problem solving and prompt writing have been injected into the curriculum. Additionally, the staff points to specific content such as graphing, increased vocabulary and expanded story elements that are now part of their curriculum. The teachers feel responsible to ensure that their students leave kindergarten with the requisite skills to perform well in future settings. They have established a list of competencies they expect their students to achieve. The increased rigor, higher standards of achievement and improved instructional strategies have all involved collaboration to develop, expand and refine the ideas that are put to use in each classroom on a daily basis.

The pressure to ensure that their students are ready for first grade and beyond has placed the teachers in a position of accountability that they were not accustomed. Many kindergartens exist in anonymity with little oversight. Raychel expressed that few people paid attention to kindergarten, but that they are now under the micro-scope. The pressure to perform has changed the dialog among the teachers. Gone are the days of letters, shapes, colors and singing. Teachers are now using data to drive their and the increased standards have teachers collaborating to develop plans to teach word families, sight words, vocabulary, problem solving, graphing, writing, and math facts. The teachers feel as though they are on display for the community and the expectation for student success is high.

### Historical Perspective of Middleton Kindergarten

The data that was collected paints a picture of synergistic relationships that promote collegiality and collaboration for the good of the students. While this was the hope of Star Center School District administration when Middleton Kindergarten School opened, it took many years to achieve this level of success. The building opened in August of 2003 with a group of six teachers from various backgrounds. They all had some kindergarten experience, but only two of them had worked together prior to the development of this building. The teachers were asked to participate in a summer workshop on all-day kindergarten practices and were provided paid stipends to work in their classrooms to prepare for the upcoming year.

However, the district did not take the opportunity to work with the teachers at building a cohesive team. As Tuckman (2001) identified in his sequence of building successful teams, the teachers were about to begin a difficult process of storming and norming. While the teachers have now moved naturally through to the performing stage, the lack of administrative support in this area may have delayed quality collaboration at a time when it was most needed. A lack of trust, selfishness, egos, unrealistic expectations and paranoia all became barriers to collaboration. Raychel explained it well, “You just can’t take five people and plop them down and say, ‘okay collaborate’. There has to be trust and that took a while.”

In addition to the lack of support with team building, there was little guidance of what was expected in the way of collaboration. The teachers acknowledged that collaboration was an expectation from the onset, but they weren’t sure what that meant. There was much confusion about individual roles. One teacher, the department head, felt

that she should control what was taught. Another teacher who had a reading specialist degree felt he should lead. Also, some of the teachers thought that collaboration meant that they must all be teaching the same content, the same way, at the same time. They viewed collaboration as a roadblock to their creativity. There was also push back with regard to increasing academic rigor and instituting research based instructional strategies.

Due to requested transfers and a retirement, the team make-up changed dramatically as three of the eight current teachers came on board in 2006. Since then, all of the teachers have worked together for three years and the team has naturally matured to the performing level. Collaboration has become part of the culture and many teachers describe the exchange as being a natural part of what they do each day. Interestingly, however, a new itinerant teacher was injected into the team this year. This teacher acknowledges how well the current team works together, but states that she is having a difficult time fitting in and working with everyone else. She claims that the other teachers are guarded with their students and their practices and she feels like an outsider when she works in the building.

### Efficacy

It is clear that the students that have matriculated through the kindergarten building have performed well beyond state and local benchmarks. The first class to graduate from the kindergarten building in 2004 is currently in fifth grade. Their performance on the Pennsylvania System of State Assessment (PSSA) during their third and fourth grade year far exceeded the state benchmark. Likewise, the 2004-2005 cohort outperformed the state benchmark by a substantial margin when they took the PSSA assessment as third graders. Additionally, the students are administered the DIBELS pre-

reading assessment each year. Their ability to meet DIBELS benchmarks is also extremely high with over 90% of the students able to blend phonemes to make words at the end of their kindergarten year.

### Study Limitations

While the subjective nature of qualitative research is often seen as an inherent limitation in case studies, qualitative researchers acknowledge their own bias and do not claim objectivity. (Glesne, 2006) Furthermore, case studies are not intended for broader generalization (Stake, 1995) and, therefore, should not be applied to larger populations. To account for my personal bias, subjective nature and constructivist paradigm, I have utilized solid research methodology, increased the trustworthiness of data analysis through triangulation, peer review and member checking. Lastly I have provided transparency through thick description of the data.

This case study was completed in a kindergarten only building in its sixth year of existence. As such the case study only provides a glimpse of the collaborative practices as they exist today with historical documentation of past practices. Therefore, this study provides limited insight into the initial team building process and the growth of collaboration from its inception until the case study was completed. Given Tuckman's phases of team building (2001), the current staff is operating at an efficient level in the "performing" stages of team development.

The study participants provided a cross section of teachers, staff, paraprofessionals, and administrators who currently work or have worked in this setting. Five of the six original teachers participated in the study. The other teacher, who is now

retired, was invited to participate but refused. This teacher could have provided valuable insight into the team development and changes in the collaborative practices.

#### Implications for Future Research

This case study provided a clear picture into Middleton Kindergarten School's collaborative practices and its impact on instruction and learning as well as how the era of accountability has affected the nature of collaboration that occurs. However, the data opened the door for future research possibilities. One such possible research topic could be a participatory action research study into the small group teaming process where the teachers could evaluate their own success at team building, identify areas of relative need, and develop a matrix for successful implementation of the team concept.

Other future research could include a longitudinal study of the kindergarten cohorts as they matriculate through school to determine the long-term impact on students in this model versus kindergarten cohorts from a more typical kindergarten models. Lastly, studies of the academic, social and emotional impact of students in the different programs could be studied to determine if one program is more effective than the other programs that are offered. These studies would allow a researcher to examine the overall impact of this delivery system versus more typical kindergarten programs.

#### Implications for Practice

The data demonstrates that effective collaboration occurs on a daily basis at Middleton Kindergarten School. The implication for immediate practice lies in how this collaboration can be guided into targeted professional development activities keeping in mind the emergent themes of the study: (1) improved instruction, (2) expanded repertoire of resources and activities, (3) continuity of instruction, (4) child-centered focus, (5)

academic rigor, (6) teacher accountability, (6) collaboration growth and improvement, and (7) building efficacy.

While case studies are not generalizable by nature, the study of this case could establish a model for kindergarten programming for other schools. Program offering, teacher's schedules, curriculum, and overall collaboration could be included in the model. Armed with the data from this case study, teachers and administrators of Middleton Kindergarten School could present their school to other decision makers and provide insight into the development of similar kindergarten programs which would help others to avoid the pitfalls that were identified in this study. Given the positive picture that this case study provided and the continued emphasis on standards-based learning, early intervention and full-day kindergarten programming, this study could be used to inform other school districts to the benefits of such a model.

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