

**A CASE STUDY OF A SECONDARY SCHOOL:
CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES IN COLLABORATION
LEADING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY**

by

Dianne M. Turner
B.G.S., Simon Fraser University, 1978
B. Ed, Simon Fraser University, 1978

A PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the Faculty
of
Education

© Dianne M. Turner 2004
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Fall 2004

All rights reserved. This work may not be
reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy
or other means, without permission of the author.

APPROVAL

NAME Dianne M. Turner
DEGREE Master of Education
TITLE A Case Study of A Secondary School: Challenges and Successes In Collaboration Leading To The Development of A Professional Learning Community

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Peter Grimmett, Professor
Senior Supervisor

Dr. Alan Taylor, Research Associate,
Applied Research in Education Services
Member

Date: December 19th 2004

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY



PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENCE

The author, whose copyright is declared on the title page of this work, has granted to Simon Fraser University the right to lend this thesis, project or extended essay to users of the Simon Fraser University Library, and to make partial or single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the library of any other university, or other educational institution, on its own behalf or for one of its users.

The author has further granted permission to Simon Fraser University to keep or make a digital copy for use in its circulating collection.

The author has further agreed that permission for multiple copying of this work for scholarly purposes may be granted by either the author or the Dean of Graduate Studies.

It is understood that copying or publication of this work for financial gain shall not be allowed without the author's written permission.

Permission for public performance, or limited permission for private scholarly use, of any multimedia materials forming part of this work, may have been granted by the author. This information may be found on the separately catalogued multimedia material and in the signed Partial Copyright Licence.

The original Partial Copyright Licence attesting to these terms, and signed by this author, may be found in the original bound copy of this work, retained in the Simon Fraser University Archive.

W. A. C. Bennett Library
Simon Fraser University
Burnaby, BC, Canada

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolution of a secondary school as it places teacher collaboration time into a regular school schedule and evaluates whether or not this time contributes to the development of a professional learning community at the school. The model of specific time set aside for staff teams and committees to meet as they work toward school improvement was the first to be introduced in the school district and has only been in existence for two years at the school.

Educational researchers have provided evidence for the challenges and successes and their findings are discussed within the context of the school being studied. Many of the barriers to the development of a professional learning community that are described in the literature have been discovered by their school along the journey to embed collaboration in the culture of the school.

A comparison between the school in the case study and a Scenario school illuminates the areas on which the case study school staff should focus as they move closer to becoming a true professional learning community.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the support and encouragement of Peter Grimmett as he sees my future more clearly than I do at times and he understands the complexity of my role through the complexity of his own.

Alan Taylor has a keen interest in helping school improvement along its journey and I appreciate the part he plays in his assistance to the school understanding itself more clearly.

I would like to express my thanks, appreciation and love to my family for their support as I worked through not only this case study, but for all the events and moments together that have been put on hold over the last few years as my role so often has taken a priority in our lives.

Finally, I am grateful to my parents, Marg and Hugh, who had a major influence on the development of my philosophy of education, teaching and learning. 'Life', they often said 'brings wonderment and magic if you never feel you have finished learning and constantly ask yourself questions about what you have learned today and what you might learn tomorrow.'

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------------|
| Approval | ii |
| Abstract | iii |
| Acknowledgments | iv |
| Table of Contents | v |
| List of Tables | vii |
| Chapter 1 : Introduction | 1 |
| Defining Learning Communities | 4 |
| Chapter Two- Hamber's Journey | 6 |
| Chapter Three- A Process not a Program | 7 |
| Chapter Four - The Journey Continues | 7 |
| Chapter 2 : Hamber's Journey | 10 |
| A New Phase of the Journey | 11 |
| Team Building and Teamwork | 17 |
| Forming | 19 |
| Storming | 20 |
| Norming | 20 |
| Performing | 20 |
| Adjourning | 20 |
| School Wide Initiatives - Cross Curricular Projects | 21 |
| School Growth Plan | 22 |
| Social Responsibility Rubric | 23 |
| Department Head Retreat | 26 |
| HIP Survey Information | 31 |
| Chapter 3 : A Process Not A Program | 36 |
| What is a professional learning community? | 36 |
| Shared Understandings | 37 |
| SMART Goal Development | 39 |
| Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community | 40 |
| Chapter 4 : Charting The Course For The Future | 51 |
| What comes next for Hamber's School Growth Process? | 51 |
| The Value of Collaborative Time | 52 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Hamber Collaboration Survey | 53 |
| What collaborative processes and actions are already in place at Hamber? | 56 |
| How does Hamber compare to the scenario school? | 58 |
| Recommendations for future development of the learning community | 74 |
| Charting the course of the learning community at Hamber | 75 |
| Appendix | 78 |
| References | 87 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | | |
|-----------|--|----|
| Table 2.1 | The following are characteristics of the student | 23 |
| Table 2.2 | HIP Collaboration Survey | 32 |
| Table 3.1 | Cultural Shifts | 43 |
| Table 4.1 | Comparison | 59 |

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“ Personal and professional growth are boundless and challenging domains. As we grow and learn, our personal capacities increase and our challenges change. We develop in our own time. The key to a life of continued growth and development is to be able to recognize the times we need new knowledge or skills and know how to get them.”

Anonymous

Teachers in the twenty first century are highly educated and more likely to pursue advanced educational degrees and professional development than ever before. The demands for improved subject based expertise at the secondary school level have caused increased expectations of professional development among teachers. In addition to the curricular pedagogy that teachers must keep current is the more recent expectation that teachers will participate in setting and achieving school wide growth plans for school improvement. This contributes to the impression that teachers have an endless amount of time to accomplish these goals and that they know how to facilitate their own growth and development or that of the school.

Teaching is a lonely act that isolates individuals such that most of the work day is spent enabling the learning of others. Very little opportunity exists for teacher growth and development where isolation permeates the school

environment and teachers do not have time to engage in dialogue that fosters improvement. Professional learning community development is a means by which teachers can participate in collaborative processes that foster school improvement and teacher development as well as creating positive working relationships leading to a school culture that supports and retains teachers and reduces isolation.

Mike Schmoker (1996, pp 10-11) quotes from an example of one school, not able to find time to meet over school improvement.

“The crush.....of our myriad of daily events and duties kept us from collaborating on such obvious and challenging concerns as how to teach composition more effectively, how to conduct discussions about literature more effectively, and how to make literature more exciting. We did not know if or how anyone was teaching composition - or even what that meant. So we worked, consciously or unconsciously, toward our own goals, within the limitations of what each of us knew or did not know. Day to day concerns kept us from reflecting on what our most important goals should be.”

Within this case study is a description of how one school, Eric Hamber Secondary School, has introduced collaborative planning time to assist the school along its journey of school wide improvement and to avoid being a school like the one described by Schmoker. Prior to the introduction of this scheduled planning time the school already exhibited a culture of collaboration to a degree and a positive school climate. Some of the questions we will investigate in the course of this case study are:

What created the collaborative culture at Hamber? How does shared decision making and a collaborative culture lead to the development of a

professional learning community? What are some of the barriers to becoming a professional learning community at Hamber? How do we compare to another professional learning community? What might make us a stronger professional learning community?

The term professional learning community is used by many educational researchers and authors to describe learning organizations that pay close attention to expanding their capacity to bring about desired results and work on “pursuing clear, shared purpose for student learning, engaging in collaborative activities to achieve their purposes, and take collective responsibility for students’ learning ” (Lieberman, 1999).

What separates schools able to build their capacity for student learning from those that have not yet achieved school improvement for student learning appears to be those that can engage in second-ordered changes. Professional learning communities fall into the second-ordered change category and therefore represent schools that bring about substantial and profound changes that occur in relationships, culture, roles, norms, communication patterns, and practices (Cuban and Tyack, 1995).

Louise Stoll describes capacity as “...a complex blend of motivation, skill, positive learning, organizational conditions and culture, and infrastructure of support. Put together, it gives individuals, groups and ultimately whole school

communities the power to get involved in and sustain learning” (Stoll, Stobart et al, 2003). Capacity, it seems, is vital to provide power to schools in sustaining student learning. It is very important, then, to provide the opportunity for capacity building to occur. It does not just happen, it evolves over time and with concerted effort through collaborative processes, therefore collaboration is the method by which teachers, teacher groups and whole schools can build their capacity.

Defining Learning Communities

School improvement literature points to the development of a professional learning community as the vehicle to make the improvement happen. Roland Barth (1990) defines a learning community as “a place where students and adults alike are engaged as active learners in matters of special importance to them and where everyone is thereby encouraging everyone else's learning” (p. 9) In addition to this definition he also investigates the roles of adults in the school community and stresses the importance of collegial, cooperative and collaborative relationships within the community.

Myers and Simpson (1998), in *Recreating Schools*, define such a community as “cultural settings in which everyone learns, in which every individual is an integral part, and in which every participant is responsible for both the learning and the overall well-being of everyone else”.(p.2)

Speck (1999) contends that all members of a learning community are mutually responsible for supporting and maintaining the community and describes the learning community as follows:

“A school learning community is one that promotes and values learning as an ongoing, active collaborative process with dynamic dialogue by teachers, students, staff, principal, parents and the school community to improve the quality of learning and life within the school. Developing schools where every aspect of the community nourishes learning and helping everyone who comes into contact with the school to contribute to that learning community are important concepts.”(p. 8)

Team work and study groups tend to foster the growth and development of a professional learning community. The challenge, of course, is to fit in time for teachers to meet together in their groups. Without a formal, scheduled time for the activity of teamwork or study groups to do their work there is little chance for this to happen. At Hamber, staff have found a way to ensure collaborative time for teachers by building it into the schedule. As you will discover in the following chapters, teachers are finding the time for collaboration with colleagues extremely valuable to them, so valuable in fact that they would like to have more time built into the schedule in the coming year. There are some successes and challenges that have been encountered along the path of implementation of collaborative time. What is clearly understood now, by staff, is that teachers working together accomplish much more and learn from one another more profoundly than if they were working on their own but that it does in fact tend to take more time to be collaborative than to work alone.

Chapter Two- Hamber's Journey

In chapter two, Hamber's Journey, the background and history that brought Hamber to this point in time as a learning community is explored. The school growth plan is used to describe the current needs in the school and how staff are addressing those needs and team building activities are described as the school evolves into a new dimension as a community.

The department head retreat, held in the spring of 2003, is described as representational of the impact that collaborative planning time's value has had on the school community. Department heads have taken on increased responsibility in a planned attempt to distribute the leadership in the school more broadly and the retreat facilitated that process as it was instrumental in creating shared leadership among the group.

The chapter concludes with a survey and results of the staff's impressions of how Hamber Instructional Planning Time (HIP) had evolved during the course of the first year. Hamber's collaborative planning time was the first time scheduled collaborative planning time was placed in the school schedule and it was the first scheduled planning time in the entire school district so the school was being watched carefully as they navigated the implementation of the scheduled planning time. Staff members were very honest in the survey and learned from it enough to make adjustments for the second year of scheduled collaborative time. Things are running much more smoothly and staff, students

and parents are satisfied with the results from the survey. Some of the findings surprised us and some were as we expected.

Chapter Three- A Process not a Program

Chapter three gives a deeper definition of a professional learning community. The chapter works through processes and focuses on collaboration as a vital component of the development of a learning community.

Characteristics of the learning community are discussed from the perspective of different authors and researchers and they are applied to what currently exists at Hamber. SMART Goals are introduced as a means by which the school improvement plan can focus on results.

Chapter Four - The Journey Continues

In chapter four the Hamber journey continues. School growth processes are discussed with reference to the collaborative influence on current goal development. The results of a survey on collaboration are discussed with a focus on how to improve the collaborative culture in the school. The survey reveals some interesting results and points in a direction for improvement.

A major focus of the chapter is the comparison between the Scenario school (appendix 1) and Eric Hamber to discover what Hamber's professional learning community already has in place and what the school could introduce that would benefit the community. Recent school wide surveys that have been completed, in addition to forums that will take place in the spring and will use the

survey data, will contribute to the development of additional supports for learners in the community and become part of our School Growth Plan.

Barriers to the development of a true collaborative culture and professional learning community are discussed in great detail as attention to these barriers, and thereby avoiding them, will allow Hamber to move forward more smoothly.

Shaping continued success at Hamber is an important part of chapter four. The school is ready to move forward now more than ever as a result of the collaborative planning time, yet there are cautions to be addressed along the way. Peer mentoring would address the support structures for teachers, particularly those who are just beginning their careers. At this point in time the current teacher contact with the school board does not allow for a professional growth model that would permit each teacher to address their growth as individuals.

Finally, in chapter four there are a few recommendations for future growth and development of the professional learning community. Each of the recommendations was made with a specific reflection on dialogue with staff, student teachers and other community members. Implementation of any recommendations in a learning community such as Hamber would come about

only after a thorough collaborative process and only if staff came to the same conclusions in a collegial dialogue.

CHAPTER 2: HAMBER'S JOURNEY

As a school based administrator you know when you have entered a secondary school community that has a strong sense of caring and all that entails. A community that, at first glance, has many of the features of other secondary schools but there, in the deeper understandings, is a place of learning where students feel connected and engaged in their learning and the staff are committed to providing the most excellent educational program possible for their students. Such a school is Eric Hamber Secondary School where I was appointed as principal two years ago.

How does a school evolve into a learning community? Most of the teachers at the school have commented that they feel extremely fortunate to have the opportunity to teach at Hamber, several in fact have been teaching at the school for their entire career. Newer teachers at Hamber will tell you that the school community has a very special 'feel' about it and that they too would like to remain at Hamber as long as possible. Why do the teachers plan to remain teaching at the school for such a long period of time and continue to be excited about their jobs? I believe that some of the answers stem from the collegial environment found within the school staff. I also believe that this is a community that continues to magically improve itself through the process of rich dialogue, collaborative processes and collegiality that is real, not contrived, as described by Hargreaves (1994). The school community is caring, supportive and morally

intelligent which makes for a positive learning environment for students and teachers alike.

Much history of the school and its development will have contributed to the current values and culture that exist today. Contained within this paper is but a snapshot of the most recent history and events that describe Hamber's journey to becoming a professional learning community. The exciting thing about writing such a paper stems from the knowledge that the community continues to improve learning experiences for all students and as such is constantly reflecting on current practice. Subsequent new chapters, describing the school community, could be written continuously and in each chapter there would be renewed evidence of school growth and improvement.

A New Phase of the Journey

Throughout the school's recent history a professional culture of dialogue and collaboration has developed. In the spring of 2003 Hamber staff, frustrated with not having enough time to accomplish their goals, made a decision that more time for collaborative instructional planning was a necessity if the school was to experience continued growth. A group of teachers and the principal of the school met to discuss methods by which additional instructional planning time could be built into the school schedule. They acknowledged that one of the key elements to the implementation of this additional collaborative planning time was that buy in and ownership were required by the staff and parents. How would they go about gaining more time for teachers to meet together and work on

issues regarding student learning? How would they explain this need to the parent community who would very likely resist teachers taking any time away from instruction?

Many schools around North America have been experimenting with alternative ways to find time for collaboration, reflection and sharing the successes that make improvements in schools. Successful schools are distinguishable from unsuccessful ones by the frequency and extents to which teachers discuss practice, collaboratively designed materials, and inform and critique one another (Little 1982). It seems that for a school to be successful, time becomes *the* key variable in the process. In fact, time has emerged as the key issue in every analysis of school change appearing in the last decade (Fullan and Miles 1992). Eric Hamber Secondary School needed to embed the collaborative planning time into the school schedule exactly as Fullan, Miles and Little have described because it is vital to school improvement processes.

The development of Eric Hamber's HIP program, Hamber Instructional Planning, was originally designed by the principal and a group of teachers committed to finding ways for school growth to continue. As a committee they brain stormed ways to create time for collaboration. Through the process they came up with the following ideas to gain more time for staff collaboration;

- create common planning time for the whole school

- have support staff (paraprofessionals) cover classes at regularly scheduled times
- schedule school wide combined classes and activities, permitting teachers to have planning time in turns
- use themes and team teaching to free teachers to meet together
- hold grade wide assemblies to provide the grade teachers an opportunity to meet together
- use staff development funds to provide release time for groups of teachers
- develop mini-conferences for grade groupings and redeploy staff to cover classes and use parent and community member expertise to provide workshops for the conferences

On a professional day in April 2003 this committee brought forward the list of brain stormed ideas for discussion, acknowledging that not all of the possible initiatives would be able to be implemented at the same time. It was also noted that parents and some staff would need to understand the purpose of collaborative time before a decision could be made. It was decided that the staff would make a decision about the preferential strategy for creating collaborative planning time and then bring it before the Parent Advisory Committee and Student Council for dialogue and hopefully approval.

Eventually the process produced a decision to implement a plan which provided a common planning time for all staff. This would include one morning per month that students would arrive at school at 10:00am to begin their class time rather than the 8:35am usual school start time. The name given to the

planned time was Hamber Instructional Planning (HIP) time and teachers would be given the opportunity to work together in two different types of collaborative time. On alternating months the HIP time would be devoted to cross curricular initiatives that related to school growth, most often dealing with the attainment of school wide goals. Every other month the HIP time would be planned by departments in addressing specific departmental needs.

Initially the Parent Advisory Committee expressed concern that the students would be missing out on one hour of instruction per month. Teachers who were on the original planning group for the implementation of collaborative planning time prepared a presentation for the Parent Advisory Committee to explain the importance of such planning time to the development of the school's capacity to enhance student learning. The presentation provided parents with information about teaching strategies and teacher isolationism and how the improvement of instruction through collaboration would build the school's capacity to address the needs of all students by developing a better school wide learning environment. When parents accepted the plan and recommended that it go ahead they also suggested that a follow up survey be done after one year to include a measure of accountability regarding the use and value of the collaborative time. Staff agreed that a survey to reflect on the use and need of the collaborative time was essential to the implementation of such a change in the community and the plan to create HIP went ahead.

At that time, in the history of the school, Hamber staff was already much further ahead than many schools in understanding the need and value of developing a collaborative culture and therefore saw the advantage of initially creating two separate types of collaborative planning days. For many years the school had a School Growth Committee in place to address goal attainment through the accreditation process. Staff had a clear understanding of the need for departments to engage in dialogue about their pedagogy and specific curriculum. Additionally, staff could see the rationale for school wide, cross curricular opportunities as they created strategies to take action with the school wide goals. Not surprisingly then, there was a move from staff committee to include a School Growth Teacher Leader within the Hamber department head team to assist with the implementation of cross curricular issues. Once collaborative time was introduced as a plan for the following school year calendar, the new department head would begin planning the cross curricular HIP days for the first year and ensure they were effectively done. Together, the two teacher leaders were responsible to oversee the School Growth process and create success around the use of the newly implemented collaborative time.

At roughly the same time as these internal changes were coming about at Hamber, the Ministry of Education created the expectation that all schools would form a School Planning Council which would be responsible for the development of the annual School Growth Plan. This process was brought in to replace the former accreditation process. Rather than a cyclical five or six year accreditation

process during which schools were expected to do intensive data gathering, analysis, development a massive report, involve all staff, many parents, some students and be externally evaluated by a ministry team in order to be granted accreditation, schools would now be expected to enter into an annual cycle of preparing, planning, acting and renewing of their School Growth Plan. In addition to this enormously different method of planning for school growth the Ministry also introduced District Accountability Contacts, new Graduation 2004 Program requirements, Grade 10 and 11 Provincial exams, Graduation Portfolios, and a new course called Planning 10. Hamber was in a position to deal with all of these changes as a result of its readiness through the formerly established School Growth Committee and the newly established Hamber Instructional Planning time (HIP). All of the Ministry of Education initiatives require teacher collaboration if they are to be implemented successfully. Fortunately, the staff at Hamber had put in place one of the most critical variables that contribute to the creation of successes for our students, time.

Planning for how HIP days would function began to take place in the spring as the days were included in the 2003-2004 School Calendar, Agenda books and Newsletters. It became evident that although Hamber staff members were very comfortable with collaboration and collegiality as a way of being, this newer process of building in the time for cross curricular initiatives required planning and development.

Team Building and Teamwork

Team building activities were planned to encourage the development of trust among staff, who did not normally work closely in committees and departments, and to ensure the processes and norms of collaboration were established early in the year.

People work collaboratively in a professional learning community to accomplish a variety of goals; it is essential therefore that teamwork and team building are a part of the expectation of how the community will work together. Because teamwork is essential to the development of the learning community the Cross Curricular Teacher Leader began the year of HIP days with a team building activity and presentation about the most effective ways of working together in a collaborative process. The following was communicated as the essential parameters for effective group work:

- Planning enough time for the group process is vital. It was acknowledged that the group process would take time in order to accommodate as rich a dialogue as possible.
- Clarification of goals and objectives is important because shared goals lead to shared outcomes. An unclear purpose for the teamwork would lead to frustration and results that do not achieve the desired outcome.

- Administrative support for the process needs to be both visible and authentic. The teamwork requires the administration, both at the school level and district level to be available in many ways. Recognition for the efforts of the teams and groups, publicly and privately encourages the whole community. There are many ways of providing support, including muffins, supplies and more opportunities for teachers to meet.
- Group size can determine whether or not all people in the group participate. It is important to not have groups that are inefficient due to the size. Additionally, when a group is too large it becomes difficult to settle on meeting dates that accommodate everyone's busy schedule.
- Meeting rooms are important to consider because it can become difficult to hold a dialogue in a setting with interruptions, poor lighting, ventilation, and other physical limitations. It is best to gear the room allocation to specific tasks.
- Communication of meeting times, locations, agendas, plans, minutes or notes of previous meetings and clear understanding of processes are large contributors of successful team/group work. A lack of clear communication and time to communicate are often the reasons for unproductive group work.
- Team work requires particular skill development and it should not be assumed that all team members possess the same level of skill. It is particularly important in creating collaborative norms and group process across the school so that it becomes easier to work together because 'that is just the way we do things here'.

- Trust building is important to the whole staff as it makes everyone feel safe in the group process. If there is speculation and mistrust, productivity and efficiency of the group will be shortchanged.
- Acknowledge what type of group composition you feel would best serve the purpose and outcome of the work. Whatever the need, for example; cross departmental grouping to plan a professional day activity to address bullying in the school community, attention should be given to the group composition.

Roberts and Pruitt (2003) suggest that there are five stages of group development that evolve into effective working group relationships and that it is important for all staff members to acknowledge the stages and recognize them as they progress through their work together. These stages were also presented to the staff as observations they might make of their own group work along the way;

Forming

In this stage the individuals transform into a group. The members of the group learn about their project or goals. There is always a period of adjustment and this can be disrupted if new members join the team after it moves beyond this initial stage.

Storming

The 'brainstorming' stage can be marked with turmoil and discontent as participants work through the frustrations of tweezing apart the goals and purpose of the group. Sometimes conflict arises and it would be beneficial to have someone ready with conflict resolution skills. It is also important that there be no personal attacks.

Norming

Not all teams can get past the storming stage successfully but if they do they will move into norming, a stage of reduced conflict, more team cohesion and support for the outcome.

Performing

This is the most productive stage of group development. The group has actually become a team working together toward a common purpose. They are able to implement their plan and can tolerate and solve any problems. There is a sense of enthusiasm for the work they have done and a feeling that they could tackle any problem.

Adjourning

This is the final stage of group development that brings conclusion to the reason the group came together in the first place. At this point there is reflection on the process, closure and celebration of accomplishment. A group that has worked particularly well may have bonded well and will look forward to working together again.

What has become evident in the school is that collaborative planning time has become part of the fabric of the school and group work has become the means to a clearly shared purpose. Although not initially, team work has recently focused on specific, measurable goals and the achieved outcomes are consistent with the school growth plan as a result. Teams are formed around a variety of needs such as, grade level subject area curriculum development, special needs of specific groups of students and specific committee tasks with the purpose of addressing issues of concern to whole school community. Group meetings have clear agendas, note taking and reporting on their progress back to staff meetings at agreed upon intervals. Professional development committees support the team work by making time within the school professional days to work on school wide initiatives.

School Wide Initiatives - Cross Curricular Projects

The current School Growth Plan goals at Hamber originally came about as a result of a previous accreditation process six years ago. Although the main intent behind the goals remains the same, they have been through many revisions over the last two years as the school now works with a SMART Goal Process (Conzemius and O'Neill, 2004). Out of the goal development and School Growth Process each member of the staff has become committed to working on at least one goal. Each of the goals has further sub-goals and committees or working groups and there is an increased level of action planning at each stage.

School Growth Plan

The School Growth Plan contains three goals, one involving social responsibility, a second dealing with literacy and the third involving a learning strategies centre. A discussion of each follows.

Goal 1: Promote and enhance social responsibility through interaction between staff, students, and community ensuring inclusion of all disciplines and activities.

There are many projects taking place at the same time in response to this goal, including the school wide development of a Code of Conduct.

One of the most interesting developments has been the introduction of the following Social Responsibility Rubric to be used on report cards for grade 8 and 9 students and to explain the social responsibility development of students to their parents.

Social Responsibility Rubric

Table 2.1 The following are characteristics of the student

| | Does not Meet Expectations D | Meets Expectations (Minimal Level) M | Fully Meets Expectation F | Exceeds Expectations E |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Attitude | May be passive or apathetic | Generally courteous and friendly. | Routinely kind and friendly. | Voluntarily helps and includes others in positive activities. |
| Cooperativeness/ Participation | Demonstrates little commitment or interest in cooperating with others | Follows specified procedures when asked to participate. | Sometimes supports and encourages others. | Elicits participation from others towards a shared purpose. |
| Classroom Community Leadership | Demonstrates little sense of responsibility towards classmates | Willingly participates within the classroom community. | Cares for and improves the classroom community. | Volunteers for responsibilities and shows strong leadership skills. |

This information appears on report cards, in the newsletter, is part of a series of Social Studies 8 lessons on citizenship and social responsibility, and can be found prominently displayed in the classrooms of the school. The language of this rubric is talked about in telephone conversations with parents and at Meet the Teacher night in the fall.

The original group of students, who received these symbols on their report cards in their grade eight year and the instruction about this terminology are now in Grade 9, they are very knowledgeable about the meaning and definition of social responsibility and can therefore talk about their own improvement or development with respect to social responsibility.

Goal 2: Create a school wide baseline for literacy support. Utilize existing baseline data to track student progress.

One school wide action plan designed to assist the literacy goal was the implementation of a Silent Reading Program this year which was unanimously endorsed by the staff and became part of the daily schedule and expectation of the community.

There is also a Reading Strategies Program being initiated to assist students who are currently reading two grades or more below grade level. One such strategy includes additional skills support for each student identified with specific reading disabilities. Two of the other reading strategies are being taught to all grade 8 and 9 students to assist them specifically with analysis reading of Science and Social Studies text books as it is determined that the strategies can benefit all learners.

The original literacy goal began back in the days of accreditation but had not advanced because the goal itself was originally based on an impression in the community that the students were not reading well, rather than on any measurements. Data were either not available or not collected and there had been no testing and no action taken for three years. Once the concept of measurable SMART Goals was introduced to the staff School Growth Committee early during the last school year they recognized that the baseline data of using FSA (Foundation Skills Assessment) scores was not assisting them nor advising

them of the realities behind the reading needs of the students. They set about gathering more information on which to base the goal development and action plans to address the needs of the students. Identification of specific details became the only way that action would be taken. There was a feeling that too much time had previously been wasted acting on a goal without a defined purpose and therefore inertia came about as a result. From this understanding the School Growth Team recommended that the school undergo a needs assessment in this school year in order to derive clarity with respect to all school goals.

Goal 3: Resource alignment for the interim Learning Strategies Centre to ensure additional support and time for students with unique learning needs.

This goal has most recently been a focus in the school while it goes through a major building addition and renovation that will provide a true Learning Strategies Resource Centre that will provide a clear central area for student support in the school. Currently and over the last several years students who have required such assistance have been in small classrooms that are in fact regular classrooms without the necessary resources for these students to access during their skills development block. The processes for referral of students for additional assistance has also been somewhat disorganized as a result of having several different rooms and space for skills development to occur. This has now become a situation the entire school community would like to remedy on behalf

of the most fragile learners. Several of the HIP day dialogues this year have centered on how to respond to specific learners.

The current School Growth Plan was endorsed by the staff, students and parents. While the year end process to develop the School Growth Plan was being overseen by the School Planning Council the School Growth Committee continued to work on reformatting each goal to fit the current state of goal attainment. It was decided through that process that the school would undergo a needs assessment and revisit our shared values, vision and goals prior to devising a new School Growth Plan for the following year (2005-2006). A survey has been conducted to gather data and information from staff, students and parents. The School Growth Committee and School Planning Committee will conduct forums with the community in the spring of 2005 to present the results of the survey and analyze the data together.

Department Head Retreat

In March 2004 the Department Heads and Administrators participated in a retreat designed to take a close look at Hamber as a Professional Learning Community and how the school might grow together to become more of a professional learning community. The school possesses many characteristics of such a community and it was important for the leaders to acknowledge each of

these characteristics. Full descriptions of the characteristics of a professional learning community that apply to Hamber appear in chapter four.

The agenda for the Department Head retreat was designed for the department heads to discover what constitutes a professional learning community, how collaboration contributes to such a community and how the HIP time was working at Hamber from their perspective. There were opportunities for rich dialogue and videos depicting how a professional learning community responds to the learning needs of the students in a school.

Within the Professional Learning Community literature and research there are many books and journal articles that define and describe professional learning communities. One such book is titled *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* by Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (1998). This is the book that was chosen by the administrators at Hamber to share with the department heads in their spring 2004 retreat. At that retreat, each person received a copy of the book and near the beginning of the session read silently a very special passage from the book. Permission has been received from the authors to include it in appendix 1 of this paper to assist the reader of this paper with an understanding of the reason for, purpose of and impact the reading had for the department heads that day. Department heads felt so strongly about the significance of the reading that they shared it with their department members following the retreat. The title of the

passage in the book is “The School as a Professional Learning Community: A Scenario” (DuFour and Eaker 1998).

The Scenario passage is a description about Connie, a first year teacher at a high school, and her experience entering the school and proceeding through her first year. Among the experiences, embedded in the culture of the school, Connie sees that there is support for her as a beginning teacher and that the expectation in the school community is that all members will support one another as they strive to become the best teachers possible. There are processes in place to ensure that support exists for all learners, including the teachers.

Beyond their classroom experiences, students at Connie’s school have the attention of their teachers in all aspects of their school life. Teachers, too, are expected to demonstrate their capacity to learn regularly and in a variety of ways. Each teacher at that school was appointed to one or more teaching teams that supported the students over three blocks of time and during a two year period, thereby getting to know the students and their learning needs extremely well. In Chapter 4 more of this professional learning community school scenario will be described in a brief comparison to the Hamber community.

In addition to the discussion of the reading, part of the Department Head retreat was devoted to the exploration of some very key questions that require attention or at least reflection. The questions revolve around three foci, learning,

collaboration and results and were somewhat adopted from the work of DuFour and Eaker (1998).

Questions for reflection and inquiry posed at the department head retreat
Collaboration:

- What is the nature of the collaborative teams at Hamber?
- Is there an organization about the teams?
- Does the dialogue focus on questions that will improve student achievement?
- How are teacher groups using time for collaboration during the school day and week other than HIP time?

Results:

- What are the major strengths of the school?
- What steps can we take together to make Hamber an even better school?
- How will we know we are making progress?

Learning:

- Does every teacher understand what each student should know and be able to do after completing a unit of instruction, course, and grade level?
- What do we expect students to learn? What are the essential learning outcomes?
- What do we have in place at Hamber to monitor each students learning on a timely basis?
- How will we know what the students have learned?
- What happens at our school when a student is not learning? How does the school respond to students who are not learning?

Following the retreat department heads decided that these questions gave them reason for reflection of their craft as teachers and that they needed to be asked of the entire staff. It was then decided that these questions would guide much of the HIP time over the coming months and if staff were not able to clearly articulate a response together then Hamber could not yet be described as a professional learning community.

As a result of their learning at the retreat, Department Heads had a more clear direction for their own departmental HIP day planning and designed days to address the specific questions around the essential learning outcomes for students in various grade levels. The longer range collaborative planning time objectives for the departments were geared toward investigating such issues as the assessment practices in the department. What does each teacher expect that the previous years teacher has covered with all students and how will we respond within our curricular area when a student is not learning?

During the first year the value of HIP became more evident yet the groups that had formed were varied in their commitment to the collaborative process as a method to address the learning needs of our students. As can be seen, in the next section, a staff survey reveals information about teacher impressions of HIP time.

HIP Survey Information

As was promised the parent community in the previous year, when Hamber Instructional Planning time was proposed to the Parent Advisory Council, staff were to be surveyed for input as to the benefits of the collaborative time and the data would be shared with parents at their meeting in May. Once results were gathered staff was presented with the findings prior to sharing it with the parent community. As would be expected staff determined the collaborative planning time to be largely successful but required some adjustments for the following year. The questions and tabulated responses can be found in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 HIP Collaboration Survey

| HIP ASSESSMENT RESULTS - April 2004 | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|----|----|----|----|---|
| Strongly Disagree | Strongly Agree | | | | | |
| 1.HIP days have provided the opportunity to discuss issues related to improving our school for its students and its teachers. | 18 | 18 | 17 | 1 | 1 | |
| 2.HIP days have provided the opportunity for open and collaborative discussion that cross traditional infrastructures. | 11 | 27 | 12 | 5 | 0 | |
| 3.HIP days have been used by departments to achieve more that possible in regular department meetings. | 13 | 14 | 11 | 8 | 7 | 2 |
| 4.HIP days should continue following a similar format | 8 | 14 | 17 | 14 | 2 | |
| 5 HIP days should continue following a modified format | 7 | 18 | 18 | 8 | 4 | |
| 6.HIP days would be better spent pursuing different goals | 5 | 12 | 19 | 10 | 9 | |
| 7. I did not benefit from HIP days | 5 | 8 | 9 | 20 | 13 | |
| 8. Teachers should take responsibility for HIP days | 10 | 18 | 14 | 8 | 3 | 2 |
| 9. Departments should take responsibility for HIP days | 10 | 20 | 7 | 11 | 6 | 1 |
| 10.Administration should take responsibility for HIP days | 4 | 3 | 8 | 15 | 25 | |
| 11. I would like to organize a HIP day | 0 | 8 | 8 | 13 | 25 | 1 |
| 12. HIP days should be at the end of the day | 6 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 40 | |
| 13. HIP days should be an extension of School Growth, Pro D, or other formal groups | 8 | 12 | 10 | 9 | 15 | |
| 14. HIP days should be left open to address issues that arise during the school year | 14 | 32 | 6 | 1 | 1 | |
| 15. All HIP days should be planned at the beginning of the year. | 2 | 3 | 7 | 24 | 19 | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|----|----|----|----|--|
| 16. HIP days should include students | 2 | 7 | 10 | 14 | 22 | |
| 17. I would like to take a greater leadership role at EH | 2 | 10 | 12 | 18 | 13 | |

The survey results revealed many details and, when reflected upon, pointed to important expectations about the use of HIP days or collaborative time. Staff welcomed the opportunity to use the collaborative time together (94%)

Staff valued the opportunity to work cross departmentally or out of what had become the regular mode of meeting in departments. (90%)

Departmental discussions had improved with the advent of more time for the process to take place (69%)

Format did not appear to be an issue one way or the other. From that we understand that staff would like to carry on as we had been for another year

Staff were divided on whether or not we should be pursuing other goals on HIP days (65% -69%)

The majority of staff felt that they had benefited from the collaborative time. (76%)

The majority of staff feel that teachers and departments should take responsibility for HIP days, not the administration (87%)

A few staff would be willing to plan the collaborative time (29%)

Majority of staff did not agree that the planning time should take place at the end of the day. (84%)

Staff were somewhat divided regarding whether HIP time should or should not be an extension of School Growth, Professional development or other formal projects. (54% - 61%) not a clear understanding.

Majority of staff felt that HIP time should be left mostly for emerging issues that would arise during the school year. (94%)

Most staff felt that the planning should happen as needed not too far in advance of the HIP day. (91%)

Staff felt that HIP time should not include students. (84%)

The majority of staff do not wish to take on leadership in the school. They are happy with being part of collaborative team development and not having anyone taking too strong a lead. (78%)

As Ministry of Education initiatives continue to take time for the staff to understand and implement, teachers asked that some HIP time be used this year for communication surrounding these initiatives. In February 2005 the District Review Team from the Ministry will visit the school district to examine the District Accountability Contract. The team will visit approximately one third of the district school sites to talk about the Ten Points of Inquiry as they relate to both the school growth process and the alignment of the School Growth Plan with the District Accountability Contract. The most recent HIP day was spent gathering

clarity around the Ten Points of Inquiry specific to Hamber. The time together in groups analyzing how Hamber as a school is achieving with respect to the Ministry of Education' inquiry was seen as productive reflection on the school.

During another recent HIP day staff was asked the following complicated questions about student learning and which will require many meetings to arrive at answers;

How do we respond when students are not learning?

What specifically do you do to assist the underachiever or learning disabled child in your class so they will experience success?

A task force has been developed to search out the answers to the questions and to develop proposals that would address the learning needs of students who are not learning. The expectation is that many staff members will be called upon to become part of the action research around this question.

In chapter four the Hamber journey continues with a description of parallels between what the literature describes as a professional learning community and descriptions of current practices at Hamber. The chapter concludes with some recommendations for future development of the professional learning community at the school.

Chapter three addresses some of the learnings and processes that are required before a school community is ready to move forward and describe itself as a true professional learning community. How do we take an already excellent school to the next level?

CHAPTER 3: A PROCESS NOT A PROGRAM

The previous chapter described a portion of the journey experienced by one particular secondary school as it deals with expectations of continual school improvement. The journey has been less difficult for Hamber than for some other schools as a result of the collaborative culture and ethos that already exists in the school. Never-the-less, any school will experience stress as change is implemented unless there is a mechanism or process for dealing with such change. This chapter addresses some of the factors that can contribute to the process of continuous school improvement and assist the navigation of the journey through change. One such factor is the development of a professional learning community, as a process not a program.

What is a professional learning community?

If we take each word separately we meet the correct definition of a professional learning community. A professional can be described as one who has specific training in a certain field and endeavors to remain current in the standard of the profession through study or professional development. Learning means that one engages in an ongoing action that addresses the curiosity of the person involved in the learning. Community brings about an image of a group of

people with a common need or interest working together to accomplish common goals.

Blending all of these individual portions of the definition together provides us with an understanding of the function of such a community. The students are not the only learners in the school community. The entire professional community commonly engages in collective inquiry leading to sustained school improvement.

Shared Understandings

As a learning community a school will elaborate on how it is going to address the needs of the learner. It will come to a stand still, however, if it does not first address the shared understandings of who they are as a community. These understandings have been described by many educational researchers as the building blocks or foundation of the professional learning community (DuFour and Eaker 1998, p.57).

Mission (purpose), vision, values and goals are important to establish for every learning community. The most successful schools function as professional learning communities “in which teachers pursue a clear shared purpose for all students’ learning, engage in collaborative activity to achieve that purpose, and take collective responsibility for student learning” (Newman and Wehlage, 1995). In a longitudinal study of school improvement conducted by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of School from 1990 to 1995, one of the most

important findings suggests that our mission statements are at the very heart of the purpose for schooling. We need to be able to ask ourselves critical questions about the shared understandings embedded in our mission statement. How will we ensure that we make it our collective responsibility that the learning happens for all students? Peter Senge (1990) contends that you cannot have a learning organization without shared vision.

Shared values have been described by Kouzes and Posner (1987) as providing significant benefits to an organization. Clarity on organizational values fosters strong feelings of personal effectiveness, promotes high levels of loyalty, facilitates consensus about key organizational goals, encourages professional behaviour, promotes strong norms about working and caring, and reduces job tension and stress.

Shared goals and their attainment provide the impetus for groups to work together. All school improvement plans require the staff to have a shared understanding of the needs behind the goal development and be willing to contribute to goal attainment. If shared purpose, vision, values and goals are not present at the beginning of the professional learning communities work together, it is highly likely that school improvement will not occur in a substantive manner. Additionally, school improvement will be seen as an event rather than an ongoing process unless there is preparatory attention to the sharing of purpose, vision, values and goals.

Much of the current educational literature describes for us the necessity of creating a school improvement planning process for building SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, time-bound) school goals (Conzemius and O'Neill, 2002).

SMART Goal Development

There are seven steps in the SMART goal development process. A description of each follows.

Step One: Prework; the process begins with attention to preparation for groups to work together, norms of collaboration, tasks, timelines clarification of the purpose of the groups work together, ground rules, and specific plan for communication around goal development.

Step Two: Building the Foundation; the purpose is to create common understanding and commitment to the purpose, direction and top priorities of the school for the next three to five years.

Step Three: Needs Assessment; the purpose is to develop a picture of the data of the schools most important needs.

Step Four: Goal Setting; the purpose is to provide specific, measurable direction to the actions, programs, resources and practices of school personnel.

Step Five: Action Planning; the purpose is to create a plan for achieving school wide, grade-level and departmental SMART goals. The plan will include the use of best practices to achieve the goals as well as staff development throughout the process.

Step Six: Implementation; the purpose is to carry out the improvement plans.

This will likely involve piloting new strategies, sharing new learning and getting feedback along the way.

Step Seven: Monitor, Adjust, and Improve; the purpose is to determine whether instructional strategies are having the intended effect and are therefore closing achievement gaps in the areas of greatest need.

Professional learning communities share clear goals, collaborate and share collective responsibility for student learning, engage in collective inquiry and focus on results. Creating a learning community is a journey. It begins with a shared understanding of where we would like to go and is fueled by a continuous process of building skills that will allow us to share the responsibility for learning in our school.

Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community

Three publications, noted here, describe the characteristics of professional learning communities. Each has slightly different terminology and focus but basically contains many of the same elements within the characteristics;

Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1995)

The authors cite five elements of a professional learning community: (1) reflective dialogue, (2) focus on student learning, (3) interaction among teacher colleagues, (4) collaboration, and (5) shared values and norms.

Hord (2004)

In her introduction to the book, which is a collection of case studies about professional learning communities from the field, Shirley Hord cites the results of a Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement project. The characteristics were organized into five themes or dimensions:

- Supportive and shared leadership
- Shared values and vision
- Collective learning and application of learning
- Supportive conditions
- Shared practice

DuFour and Eaker (1998)

In chapter two of Professional Learning Communities at Work, the authors describe six characteristics of a professional learning community.

1. Shared mission, vision and values
2. Collective inquiry
3. Collaborative teams
4. Action orientation and experimentation
5. Continuous improvement
6. Result orientation

Each of the sets of characteristics contains an expectation that the participants are engaged in collaborative teams for the purpose of collective inquiry and that the inquiry is focused on student learning. Each suggests that

there must be a set of shared norms and values guiding the work that the professionals are engaging in and each set contains an assumption that every member of the staff will be engaged in this type of practice.

In their book entitled ' Getting Started - Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities' DuFour and Eaker (2002), Bob Eaker provides a comparison chart that shows the differences between school communities that are engaged as professional learning communities with those that are more traditional. Eaker refers to this as a cultural shift that transforms a school into a professional learning community. By school culture he means that it describes "how we do things around here". The cultural shift comparative chart is shown next.

Table 3.1 Cultural Shifts

Collaboration

| Traditional Schools | Professional Learning Communities |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Isolation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative Teams |

Developing a Mission Statement

| Traditional Schools | Professional Learning Communities |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generic statements • Statements are brief | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements clarify what students will learn • Statements address the question, "How will we know what students have learned?" • Statement clarifies how school will respond when students do not learn. |

Developing Goal Statements

| Traditional School | Professional Learning Communities |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements are random • Goals are excessive in number • Goals focus on means rather than the ends • Goals difficult to measure • Goals not closely monitored | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements linked to vision • Goals few in number • Goals focused on desired outcomes • Goals measurable • Continuously monitored • Designed to produce short and long term wins |

Focus on Learning

| Traditional School | Professional Learning Communities |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary focus on teaching | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary focus on learning |

Curriculum

| Traditional School | Professional Learning Communities |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each teacher independently decides what to teach • Curriculum overload is common | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboratively agreed upon curriculum focuses on what students are expected to learn • Assessment is developed through collaboration • A plan for responding when students don't learn is developed through collaboration. |

Collective Inquiry

| Traditional School | Professional Learning Communities |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions about improvement strategies are made by 'averaging opinions' | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decisions are research based with collaborative teams of teachers seeking out the best practices. |

Leadership

| Traditional School | Professional Learning Communities |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrators are viewed as being in leadership positions while teachers are viewed as 'implementers' or followers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administrators are viewed as leaders of leaders. Teachers are viewed as transformational leaders |

School Improvement Plans

| Traditional Schools | Professional Learning Communities |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School improvement plans focus on a wide variety of things The goal is usually to get the plan turned in then to ignore it. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School improvement plan focuses on a few important goals that will affect student learning the plan is the vehicle for organized, sustained school improvement |

Research and Results

| Traditional Schools | Professional Learning Communities |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effectiveness of improvement strategies is externally validated. Teachers rely on others outside the school to identify what works. Emphasis is placed on how teachers like various approaches | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approaches are internally validated. Teams of teachers try various approaches and collaborate on how the approaches affect student learning The effect on student learning is the primary basis for assessing various improvement strategies. |

As shown in Table 3.1 (DuFour and Eaker, 2002), there are three main areas that the learning community must focus on if the school is to experience success with student learning; Collaboration, Results and Student Learning.

Each of these requires continual attention of the learning community. Although each of these foci is important to analyze in the context of professional learning communities the remainder of this chapter will focus on the significance that collaboration plays in a learning community and what planning is required to ensure that collaboration efforts are successful.

There is an ever increasing agreement among members of the educational research community that learning communities appear to be impacting on school improvement in ways that professional and staff development has been unable to do. There is an even more resounding agreement that strong collaborative cultures are evident in successful schools. The implication for the future of professional development in our schools is immense. Collaboration in a school with such a culture does not occur only five of six times per year as does the usual staff development cycle. A school with a culture of collaboration will engage in this activity regularly, perhaps weekly or more when necessary. Milbrey McLaughlin, Michael Fullan, and Fred Newmann all have expressed the importance and significance of collaborative cultures in schools.

Need for collaborative Culture.....

‘Throughout our ten year study, whenever we found an effective school or an effective department within a school, without exception that school or department has been a part of a collaborative professional learning community.’

(Milbrey McLaughlin, 1995)

‘Improving schools require collaborative cultures..... Without collaborative skills and relationships, it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as you need to know to improve.’

(Michael Fullan, 1999)

‘If schools want to enhance their capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a

collaborative culture.....When groups, rather than individuals, are seen as the main units for implementing curriculum, instruction, and assessment, they facilitate development of shared purposes for student learning and collective responsibilities to achieve it.'

(Fred Newmann, 1995)

In the February 2004 Phi Delta Kappan journal, Mike Schmoker looked at why strategic planning in school reform has failed and why the more simple, affordable structures appear to be supporting substantive instructional improvements. He makes a case for developing learning communities rather than wasting our valuable resources on efforts that have continued to yield minimal results.

In the article, Michael Fullan refers to Judith Warren Little's research in the following way: "No words could sum up this discussion of school-level factors [that affect achievement] more accurately than those of Judith Little." Then he further quotes her "school improvement is most surely and thoroughly achieved when teachers engage in frequent continuous and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice....adequate to the complexities of teaching, capable of distinguishing one practice and its virtue from another."

Fullan continues to quote Little as she describes that the greatest degree of group productivity occurs when teachers "plan, design, research, evaluate, and prepare teaching materials together."

In the final paragraph of the article, Mike Schmoker reaches a very strong conclusion that true collaboration could be the tipping point away from radical reform movements and could quite possibly become the most productive shift in the history of educational practice.

Rick DuFour (1998) emphasizes that collaboration by invitation will not bring about results. He clarifies that a tight-loose structure of team grouping is the best way to ensure that collaboration leads to outcomes. Teams, he says, need to have four prerequisites in place to be effective;

1. Time for collaboration must be built into the school day and year.
2. The purpose of collaboration must be made explicit
3. School staff need training and support to know how to collaborate and therefore to be effective.
4. Educators must accept their responsibility to work together as true professional colleagues.

There are a variety of types of teams/groups that have compelling reasons to meet together such as, grade or subject level, shared students, school wide task forces, areas of professional development interests and mentorship groups. Every school community has specific needs with respect to school wide goals and departmental goals. Much of the collaborative planning time could help to assist these needs.

“True collaboration is a discipline - a fragile, high maintenance set of practices and attitudes that need constant care and attention. We can never presume that productive collaboration is a foregone conclusion. We can assume that it will never be a natural easy process for teachers to engage in automatically”.

(Mike Schmoker, 2001)

Collaboration and reflection can be two of the most powerful tools in the development of a true learning community. Researchers are clear that this is proving to be a significant factor in improving schools. If collaboration is such a powerful tool it is vital that district leaders and Ministry of Education officials support the plans of schools who wish to rearrange the school day or week to build in time for the very relevant purpose of true collaboration. If schools are prevented from experimenting with this ‘affordable’ tool for improvement, the tipping point that could eventually lead to the ‘most productive shift in educational practice’ (Schmoker 2004) will never be realized. Packaged programs of reform in educational change continue to cost us copious amounts of dollars and, as has been discussed, result in very little change. Rick DuFour points out very clearly that the development of a professional learning community is not a program....it is a process. A process, which could be argued, we cannot afford to not implement for the purpose of continuous growth in our schools.

Teachers’ mind sets about the craft of teaching can help to transform schools into professional learning communities if they recognize that as

professionals they have an obligation to continue their development and experience professional growth throughout their entire career.

If the teacher is truly professional then most of the emphasis will be on student learning rather than teaching and it will be recognized that teaching has not happened if learning has not occurred. Students will be engaged in their learning in a professional learning community in an active manner because the plan for the lesson takes into account the need for meaningful ways to have students learn at high levels. Teachers and their colleagues will have worked together to determine the essential learning outcomes for the curriculum and will have found relevant and powerful ways to make students understand the intended learning outcomes.

The professional teacher will be reading the most current research and professional development journals in search of ways to improve instruction or will have been working with a mentor or curriculum team in the school. There will be ongoing dialogue about the best pedagogy around the teaching of material and how the students are learning. The teacher as role model will demonstrate to the students the importance of taking on a leadership role in the community by being responsible for highly effective communication and for taking absolute responsibility for the learning of all students in the class.

And finally, the teacher will demonstrate a great deal of caring for the students in the class as is expected in a professional learning community.

Creating a professional learning community takes time and takes the type of caring and respect that influences the entire school ethos. It supports the entire school community. Everyone benefits from the culture derived from collegial and collaborative efforts.

In chapter four the Hamber journey continues with a comparative examination of what elements and characteristics of a professional learning community already exist at the school and those that need support and attention.

CHAPTER 4: CHARTING THE COURSE FOR THE FUTURE

In this chapter the school is examined to see whether or not the collaborative processes already in place are effective and a comparison is drawn between the Scenario (appendix 1) and the current learning community at Hamber. Following the analysis of the professional learning community, suggestions for future growth of the school's learning community will focus on sustainability.

The results of a survey on staff understanding of collaboration are included in the chapter to assist in clarification of staff impressions of and their appreciation for collaboration and the extent to which it has become a part of the school culture.

What comes next for Hamber's School Growth Process?

As was mentioned in chapter two, the School Growth Plan, and as a result, the goals that began a few years ago, need to be revised and updated this year. This will be the first time the school staff have gone through a needs assessment process since the previous accreditation process six years ago. All the students and staff have been surveyed over the last few months in preparation for the needs assessment process as described in the SMART goals process in chapter three. The parent community surveys are coming in at the

same time this paper is being written so those results are not yet ready to discuss. A team of teachers, support staff, students, parents and administrators collaboratively developed the survey with the assistance of a professional survey creator and data analyst. Over the coming weeks he will provide us with a complete breakdown of the results for us to use in needs assessment and focus meetings with our community.

Survey results will create a rich dialogue for the needs assessment when student, parent and staff forums take place in the spring of 2005. From this data and other data collected from the community, new goals will be developed through our school growth process. There is a strong likelihood that some part of the current goals will be fine tuned and return to become part of the new goals.

The Value of Collaborative Time

In this second year of collaborative planning time the school has determined more clearly, how and why the use of the time is valuable to them. There are many successes according to the staff and there are still some challenges as have been discovered in a survey on collaboration conducted recently. The following is a list of the questions teachers were asked to respond to in the survey on collaboration:

Hamber Collaboration Survey

[Nearly always Occasionally Very seldom]

1. We all have a good idea what our colleagues are teaching at the same grade level or subject areas are teaching.
2. We are familiar with each other's classroom management style.
3. We observe each other's teaching.
4. There is substantial agreement on criteria for different levels of achievement among our colleagues.
5. Sections of the same course follow substantially the same curricula.
6. Staff agree about the general outcomes that they should expect each year in a course.
7. Colleagues having difficulty with problem students or in teaching certain subject matter can find ready help and support.
8. When students are having serious problems, all their teachers meet together to seek solutions.
9. Our colleagues share useful and effective teaching strategies with each other.
10. Colleagues meet at least once every two weeks to discuss mutual concerns or seek answers to teaching and learning problems.
11. We can fit in time for meetings whenever they are necessary.

What are some of the topics you would like to discuss at the upcoming staff meetings or on HIP days?

At our school, what happens during meetings of staff committees?

[Nearly always Occasionally Very seldom]

1. We all understand and accept the purpose of the meeting before it starts.
2. Every meeting has an agenda printed and distributed before it begins, along with any background materials on issues to be discussed at the meeting.
3. Someone takes notes, or minutes, so that a record of what we do exists.
4. At the first meeting of any committee, decisions are made about such procedural issues as frequency and time of meetings, breakdown of tasks, time line for accomplishing goals, and keeping on task expectations.

5. Disagreements among team members are handled in such a way as to reach eventual consensus and minimize ill feelings.
6. Staff is well trained and experienced in effective collaboration.

(Questions adapted from NES 1999)

Results from the survey:

1. Majority of staff felt that they occasionally or very seldom know what colleagues are teaching in same grade- subject level.
2. Greatest number of staff responded that they very seldom are familiar with each other's classroom management styles.
3. Greatest percentage of staff reported that they do not observe each other's teaching.
4. Many staff work together on assessment criteria for same grade-subject level.
5. Most classes at same grade-subject level follow the same curriculum.
6. Many staff agree on the same general outcomes that should be expected each year.
7. Almost all colleagues who are having difficulty with subject matter or problem students can find help and support.
8. Teachers meet together to discuss students who are having difficulty to talk about solutions occasionally.
9. Occasionally colleagues share useful and effective teaching strategies.
10. Colleagues meet regularly to discuss mutual concerns or to seek answers to learning problems very seldom.
11. Meetings can be fit in nearly always.

Staff created the following list of items they would like to have discussed at upcoming staff meetings and Hip days:

- grading criteria

- code of conduct
- teaching strategies
- cross curricular initiatives
- students who have problems
- coordinated curriculum
- staffing and time tabling issues

At our school;

1. We nearly always understand the purpose of a meeting before it starts
2. Agendas are nearly always printed before a meeting begins
3. Minutes for the meetings nearly always are taken.
4. Prior to the team meetings very seldom are procedural issues are discussed.
5. Nearly always staff member disagreements in meetings are handled to avoid ill feelings.
6. Staff members are very seldom well trained and experienced ineffective collaboration.

From the analysis of the results came the discovery that the staff still feels that collaborative process opportunities are lacking somewhat due to insufficient time for collaboration. The feeling is that one day per month built into the schedule only begins to address the needs of the school at this time. There was also some concern that there is not enough time to meet and discuss students who are experiencing extreme difficulty and to put in place strategies to help those students. Departments who meet regularly to plan the curriculum per grade and subject area felt the planning time was of great benefit to them as a department and as a result their capacity to function in the classroom.

One item that stood out as a significant concern, besides not having enough time to meet together, was that there does appear to be a lack of understanding of collaborative skills among many staff and that this could probably be addressed with some professional development time devoted to collaborative process skill building. Further to the skill development, staff expressed a need for procedural issues such as action planning and deciding who is responsible for various tasks or outcomes that flow from the meetings of the collaborative teams to be decided and worked on within the group. Overall staff view collaboration as having a developmental or evolutionary aspect to it and that it takes time to become effective collaborators.

What collaborative processes and actions are already in place at Hamber?

As was mentioned in chapter two, the school has had a strong collaborative culture for many years. Shared decision making and leadership have been developing over time and there are processes in place now with committee structures that ensure all staff have the opportunity to become involved in the complex organizational needs of the school community. Not all staff shares in the responsibility for the school improvement plan however. There are several people who are fully committed to continual school growth and are on many committees and others who only appear to participate in achieving the goals of the school growth plan in professional day dialogue or the occasional HIP day discussion geared to goal attainment. The staff group that is not involved

with school improvement plans, to a great degree, is getting smaller. More staff are buying into school wide initiatives as a result and there seems to be more shared decision making on staff. Staff meetings have become an opportunity to discuss relevant issues rather than for the dissemination of information, thereby including those 'not so involved' staff members in the processes in which they might not normally participate. Various teachers who have assumed leadership roles in the school often present recent findings or information reporting out from committees during the staff meetings. This is very different than it has been in the past.

Within the school there are many school improvement actions going on simultaneously. The following is a list of current plans and activities that indicate a healthy collaborative process is ongoing (many of the groups are continuing on from previous HIP day discussions/plans last year);

- HIP discussion - Integration of Special Education Students in the Classroom
- HIP discussion - Bridging the transition of students from Gr. 7 - Gr. 8
- SMART goal development Team- Several teacher leaders in training.
- Collective Inquiry and Action Research Team - Reading Development
- Code of Conduct Development Team
- Literature Study Group
- Silent Reading Development team
- Social Responsibility Development Indicator Team
- Peer Mentoring/Informal
- New teacher support team

- Resource Team support for 'Grey Area' skills development students
- Reading Strategies Team
- School Growth Committee
- School Planning Council
- Staff Committee
- Technology Planning Committee
- School Finance Committee
- Department Head Professional Development Group
- Homework Support Development Team

As well as these current plans and activities there are many other committees meeting for a variety of reasons but not for sustained project work as do these committees and teams.

How does Hamber compare to the scenario school?

In what ways does Hamber compare to the Scenario school in Appendix 1?

What characteristics of the ideal learning community does Hamber already demonstrate?

What characteristics are missing from Hamber at this time?

The following table 4.1 describes the comparison:

Table 4.1 Comparison

| SCENARIO SCHOOL | HAMBER |
|--|---|
| Beginning teachers assigned a trained mentor | Beginning teachers not assigned a mentor |
| New teacher orientation - 5 days before the start of school year. Planning of orientation from administration and many other staff groups. New teachers continue orientation sessions every month. | New teacher orientation begins after the start of the year. One day after school and every month for three months after first meeting. Principal/vice principal organize meetings. |
| Vision statement becomes major focus of orientation | School mission statement, vision and goals are a major part of orientation |
| Department Heads/Chairperson/ mentor spend time working with new teachers going over scope and sequence of curriculum, course descriptions, reviewing the departmentally, jointly, developed essential learning outcomes for the courses new teacher will be teaching. | This is randomly done and not an expectation, although many department heads do take on this responsibility it is voluntary and not necessarily the norm. Essential learning outcomes within the department understanding not yet well established. |
| Departments have their own vision statements and goals. Each teacher knows what they are and committed to implementing the goals | Departments have annual goal development and review process. |
| Department files are open for the use of all department members. Sharing of collaboratively developed materials is the norm. | Some departments share materials and collaboratively plan materials others do not. |
| Assessment materials are jointly developed. | Some assessment materials are jointly developed. |
| President of teachers association part of new teacher orientation process jointly organized by staff members. Describes the linkage between the school, district and union. | Staff union representatives present a part of the orientation. Not jointly planned with the administration. |
| Support services in the school present how they are available to assist teachers with students who are experiencing difficulty. | Support services in the school present how they are available to assist teaches with students who are experiencing difficulty. |
| Mentor helped new teacher set up classroom and work on first day/week organization. | No mentor to help new teachers with classroom set up or develop first week organization. |
| Whole staff celebrates return to school | Staff celebrates return to school |

| | |
|---|---|
| New teachers are introduced at staff meeting by mentor and given staff tee-shirt. | New staff are introduced by principal and given school mug./pen/scarf. |
| Teaching teams of three share students for two years and plan together. | Students have eight different teachers and a new set of eight the following year. |
| Teachers are also part of curricular teams and work on the essential learning outcomes for each course in the subject area. | Teachers are part of subject departments and recently are working on essential learning outcomes for each subject, keeping in mind the provincial learning outcomes. |
| Assessment criteria and instruments commonly developed. Consistent grading of student work. | Assessment criteria and instruments commonly developed in some departments. |
| Analysis of student performance done at regular intervals in the year by all teachers and strategies to assist the struggling student developed together. | Analysis of student performance done by department heads each term and at year end. Strategies to assist struggling students are becoming more consistent. |
| Principal shares journal articles with new teachers as well as others for reflection | Principal shares articles with department heads and some new teachers at the beginning of the year. |
| Student support team accepts referrals for students who are not doing well academically or behaviourally. | School based team accepts referrals for students not doing well academically or behaviourally. |
| Mentors trained in classroom observations to assist new teachers prior to the formal observations and evaluations of the principal | No formal process of support for new teacher prior to evaluation by administrator. |
| Action research projects take place throughout the school. Many teachers involved in projects. Teachers are encouraged to experiment. | One action research project or two per year take place and very few teachers involved. |
| District offers three areas of ongoing professional development. Teaching teams are encouraged to pursue one of the three topics for three years. | District offers Professional development for teachers but not in a sustained topic over more than two sessions. (With the exception of the leadership development program for 40 teachers per year) |
| School hired a technology teacher mentor to work with staff on their prep periods and as needed for one year. | Technology mentor is available two days per year. School has two teaching blocks assigned to two teachers to assist with computer support to teachers in the school. |

| | |
|--|--|
| Teachers have individual professional growth plans. | Teachers do not have professional growth plans and evaluation is randomly done, not on a cycle every few years. |
| Teachers receive credit on the salary scale to participate in additional professional development by the district. | Teachers do not receive any monetary reward for upgrading through the school board but do receive rewards for upgrading through the university programs offered. |
| Many surveys conducted during the year regarding feedback from/to the whole staff, departments, administration, parents and students. Including follow up phone surveys of graduated students | Surveys regularly done school wide and in smaller groupings for feedback on school growth and initiatives. |
| Teachers perform an annual self evaluation | Some teachers do self evaluation for their own feedback |
| Common planning time for the teaching teams | No common planning time arranged |
| One day per week there is collaborative planning time set aside. Teachers day 7:45 - 3:45, students arrive at 8:05 Planning days - teachers 7:30, students 8:30 | Collaborative one day per month. Normal classes begin at 8:35 HIP day start time for staff 8:35 Start time for students 10:00 |
| Release time available if more time for collaboration is required. | Release time available if more time is needed. Two departments took advantage of the offer last year. |
| Task forces meet three times per year. All staff participates on a task for at some time. Not all at once. | Task forces are generally not regular and normally the same teacher leaders do most of the work. |
| All work done during the year is reflected on and filtered through the lens of the vision statement. | Vision statement not always the guiding principle behind the actions of staff, parents or students. |

Although there are differences in the way things are done between the school in the Scenario and Hamber, many of the professional learning community characteristics are the same. There are only a few characteristics Hamber does not possess when the comparison is drawn.

From the beginning of the new teacher's experience in the Scenario she was provided a formally trained mentor. Hamber does not have a formal peer mentor program set up but there has been discussion initiated this year by the nine new teachers when they were asked for feedback about the beginning of their year and what might have made the transition to a new school easier for them. They talked about the need for a more formalized mentor program.

The new teacher orientation in the Scenario school is designed and conducted almost entirely by teachers. At Hamber most of the orientation is designed by the administration. The vision statement at Connie's school is very powerful and obviously driving a great deal of the school improvement plan, whereas at Hamber the statement is not at the forefront of everything done in school improvement. Perhaps it should be more a focal point in school improvement plans.

Department Heads play a significant role in the new teachers' acquisition of skills in the scenario. At Hamber a new teacher would likely ask for assistance and be given the help but there is not a specific plan prior to the arrival to show the new teachers the essential learning outcomes, materials and assessment tools. Most teachers would have been grateful for such assistance at the beginning of their careers and the burden of working through everything from scratch, in isolation, would have been eliminated.

Teaching teams in the scenario school have been set up so teachers can pay close attention to both the curriculum and the student learners. The possibility of students slipping through the cracks is eliminated when so many teachers are supporting the same group of students. In the current timetable at Hamber students have eight different teachers and there is only one counselor per 300 students. This makes communication about specific student needs quite difficult and increases the possibility of a student slipping through the cracks.

Prior to the administrator doing a formal evaluation of the new teacher in the scenario school, the mentor, who has had training in the area of peer observation in the classroom, spends considerable time during the school year observing the new teacher and giving feedback. Once the principal goes in to observe in the classroom the self-reflective process is well underway. Under the current teaching contract, teachers at Hamber could not work with peer observation and a professional growth plan. The only time peer support comes into play is once a teacher has received an unsatisfactory teaching report or if it is understood that an unsatisfactory report will likely take place if the support does not happen immediately. A better scenario for teachers in our schools would be to tap into that very rich knowledge base of our master teachers and have new teachers receive assistance from the mentors at the beginning of their careers. A professional growth plan for teachers seems to be a benefit because the professional teacher decides what needs to be learned right from the

beginning of the teaching career. The expectation that the professional will engage in ongoing learning throughout their entire career and that it is guided by support of peers in the process seems to be a strong model of professional empowerment.

Probably one of the most significant differences between the two schools is the amount of collaborative planning time in place in the scenario school with very specific plans for the use of that time. According to teachers at Hamber, the current model of one day per month and a professional day six more times during the year to assist with the opportunity for collaboration does not appear to be enough time for staff to effectively work through issues that, if addressed, would provide a better learning community for all students and staff.

What are the barriers to the development of a professional learning community in a school?

One of the first barriers to overcome is teacher isolation. Teaching is a lonely act. Learning communities are the means by which we can break down the isolation and be supportive of one another in the development of a collaborative culture. Most of the adult conversations during a teacher's day are brief and over a hurried walk to the classroom, lunchroom or as teachers sign in at the office in the morning.

“In many cases, teachers share the same feelings of alienation in school that students do. Teacher isolation has permeated schools for decades. Teachers work in their individual classrooms with little time to interact and connect with other adults”

(Coombs, Wiser and Whitaker, 1999)

Breaking down the isolation barrier needs more attention at Hamber but it is significantly reduced through the introduction of time for collaboration. The norm of groups working together is reaching a more significant comfort level for staff and isolation exists only in rare cases. As described in chapter two, creation of a collaborative environment has been described as the most important factor for school improvement.

“Creating a collaborative culture is the single most important factor for successful school improvement initiatives and the first order of business for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their school.”

(Eastwood and Lewis, 1992)

Collaboration ‘lite’ as described by Rick DuFour (2003) can create a barrier to the development of the professional learning community. This is described as incomplete understanding of collaborative skills necessary to engage in true collaboration, rich dialogue and working together as a group effectively. The collaboration has to engage the participant in meaningful, purposeful direction for it not to be ‘lite’. DuFour distinguishes between collaboration and congeniality or camaraderie. He suggests that participants not be invited or encouraged to collaborate but expected to participate and that the

collaboration be systematic whereby it is embedded in the routines of the school.

When all the staff are not participating equally or if any tend to walk away from the collaborative process while the staff are engaged in problem solving or learning something together there is a sense of the team being broken as described by a few staff members during the survey on collaboration. Somehow the collective will to move forward with school growth suffers from that visual cue of someone leaving the process.

Not taking responsibility for student learning can contribute to serious misdirection of the school growth process. Placing blame for students' inability to learn on home environment or other outside of school factors eliminates the responsibility the school has to ensure that the student will learn. Fortunately this is not a problem at Hamber as the staff are always looking for a reason for students to learn rather than the other way around. The caring community that exists at the school helps to ensure that if there are external issues in the students life that would somewhat cause the student to be at a disadvantage, the student receives additional supports from the school to help minimize the obstacles.

Not enough time for collaboration is seen as the one true barrier that, if left unattended, will prevent the school from developing into a professional learning community with any true definition of the term. Fortunately, at Hamber the school

staff sought a way by which the current level of collaborative time could be implemented, are grateful, use it wisely and are looking to find ways to build in more time for the processes to evolve more rapidly. The capacity of the staff to work on cross curricular initiatives would not have occurred to the degree it has without the time built into the schedule.

Lack of trust among staff and between staff and administration has been described as a barrier to staff working together and can contribute to problems in the development of a professional learning community. The professional learning community relies on trust building that implies administration and teachers are working together toward school improvement. All staff members accept the responsibility for the school growth process. Trust building begins with the principal, who in turn creates an opportunity for shared leadership with the staff. As the staff see that there is genuinely shared leadership they begin to trust the principal and the principal engages in the same learning that the entire staff is involved with. This is a different view of educational organizations than that of a traditional school and requires that all members of the community not be working in a hierarchical manner in order to allow that trust to develop and deepen.

“Productive collective actions are more likely to occur when relational trust is present among organizational members.....(R)elational trust creates an environment where individuals share a moral commitment to act in the interest of the collectivity...This ethical basis for individual action constitutes a moral resource that the institution can draw upon to initiate and sustain change”.

(Bryk and Schneider, 1996)

The final barrier sometimes goes undetected for a period of time and can lead to extreme frustration on the part of staff. Inability to establish clear and focused goals will create a problem when all the work that is being done does not appear to meet the needs of the community or be a result of a well thought out needs assessment process. This happened at Hamber in the last round of accreditation. From the original accreditation process three goals were developed as stated in chapter two. The goal relating to literacy was misunderstood from the beginning of the entire process and somewhat misrepresented the needs of the community. During accreditation surveys parents said that they wanted their children to speak nothing but English at school so their language acquisition would be more rapid. This became mistranslated during the goal development phase and because there was such limited opportunity for collaboration throughout the process the issue came back defined as the parents feeling that the school had a problem with literacy. When the school community then began to work on the goal they realized the data did not indicate that there was a problem with literacy. A great deal of effort went into the goal initially but created the frustration referred to above. Now the goal has been refined and reconfigured to be more reflective of the needs of the population but is entirely different than what was originally worked on in the beginning, thus pointing to the need for clarity and focus for the goals in the first place. The next step in the needs assessment will be to re-clarify the vision as a school prior to setting out any new goals. If the school growth plan goals are not

directly linked to a vision for the school, staff, parents and students will not understand the reason for the goals.

Shaping continued success and growth of the professional learning community.

Recently the school staff had the privilege of working with an eager group of talented student teachers at the school. As they worked together closely during their three months at the school the administration, mentor teachers and student teachers participated in a series of orientation workshops that were designed to provide specific professional development for the student teacher at Hamber. Some of the dialogue during the workshops revolved around the fact that their student teacher peers placed at other schools did not have the same type of experience that they received at Hamber during their practicum. Further probing shed some light on the reasons for the different experiences.

One reason presented by the student teachers for the difference is that Hamber is a caring and highly respectful school community. All staff members were thoughtful in their treatment of the student teachers and set up the expectations in their classrooms that these young people, as student teachers, were already professionals and would be afforded the respect we would expect all adults in the building be given. The school ethos is such that the students would simply be expected to support the student teachers in their learning.

The other more distinct difference they said was the collaborative culture that exists in the school. Staff readily meet to plan around student learning issues, activities that would enhance student learning, and to create new types of learning relationships through cross curricular initiatives. The student teachers saw this as a way that the school encouraged development of shared leadership that enhanced the capacity of the school to improve.

Staff meetings were another comparison point that provided feedback with respect to student teachers in other schools. Hamber staff meetings are a time for dialogue, sometimes small groups, but most often the whole group. Often a team leader from a particular committee will be reporting out or be looking for some feedback for the committee to carry on with its work. The meetings are never entirely information dissemination, certainly not the type of information that could be type written on the back of the agenda for the meeting, the type of information teachers can read as they are waiting for the meeting to begin or at their leisure later in the day. Meeting time at Hamber is thought of as too precious to waste and the discussion together is so much more valuable than teachers having to sit and listen to the principal drone on with such information. The administrators sometimes take a lead role in opening up a discussion if staff feels that it is necessary for the principal to take the lead but more often than not the administration begins the meeting with a few remarks and then hands over the meeting to committee spokespersons.

Student teachers from other schools were intrigued with the differences and identified that Hamber would probably provide an opportunity for teacher professional development that many other environments might not. Student teachers at Hamber initially took for granted that this was just the way things are done everywhere until they had a midterm seminar together with their peers back at their university. During the seminar the student teachers also identified that the opportunity for shared leadership among a school staff would be much more empowering for a professional and definitely less isolating.

Not every teacher in Hamber is committed to the collaborative process to the same degree and some have expressed that they are close to retirement and therefore don't feel the need or desire to become involved in committees. Not every teacher provided support to the student teachers or new teachers. It is agreed on staff that no teacher should be required to be on a team or committee or to participate in activities that feel foreign to them. For that reason the experienced and soon-to- retire staff members have been asked to become guiding mentors, using their expertise and experience to reflect back to staff if they perceived anything being planned would hurt students or teachers. The knowledge and wisdom that these master teachers bring to the school community would be lost when they retire if they were not asked to act as mentors in the school.

When workshops were planned for the student teachers they included a very intricate set of sessions on professional learning communities and the benefits of collaboration in the community. Mentoring roles were set up with teachers in addition to their sponsor teachers so they would be given a broader exposure to the school community. Each of the mentors was also asked to attend the professional learning community workshops and by the time the first month had passed the student teachers were being described by many staff as the most knowledgeable, and committed group of student teachers that they had ever had at the school. In the summary exit interviews held with the student teachers they described themselves as feeling confident that they understood the benefits of a learning community and the collaborative process. When asked if they thought they might have an influence on their school community, working as a professional learning community, when they finally were appointed in a teaching role they each felt completely sure that they would now be able to impact on the development of a such a community because they understood the characteristics and value of such a community.

Nine new teachers came to the school this year and have gone through almost the same set of workshops that were provided for the student teachers last spring. Each of them is somehow involved in the school community at this point, whether on a committee or sponsoring groups of students on teams or clubs. Each of them has expressed that this has made a difference for them and has provided hope that in this type of community they can really grow and

develop as a professional. As reported in chapter two, the new staff have commented that they enjoy working at Hamber very much. They know what a true professional learning community should be like, from the work done together in the workshops and they will be part of the future growth and development of the learning community over time.

How is the professional learning community at Hamber sustained and how will it grow over time? The community is built even stronger than it currently is by removing barriers to the development of the learning community. More meeting time needs to be created for the teachers to do their collaborative work. Staff will work carefully through goal development in the spring so they do not end up with the 'wrong' goals. Reduction of the isolation felt by teachers will continue to encourage staff to work together and increase their capacity for true collaboration. All staff will assume responsibility for student learning and will continue to create professional development activities that promote the development of shared leadership on the staff.

As Rick DuFour suggests, our three most powerful tools in the quest to define ourselves as learning communities is to focus on student learning, focus on collaboration and focus on results. Groups of staff members need to identify and pursue specific, measurable, results-oriented goals and look for student successes to be the barometer of our own successes. (DuFour, 2003)

Much of what is already in place at Hamber has led to many successes over the years. Below are a few strategic recommendations aimed at moving the entire school forward as a professional learning community.

Recommendations for future development of the learning community

- ❑ Collaborative skills development - provide workshops on group facilitation for all staff so the process on collaboration will lead to greater success for committee work.
- ❑ Peer Mentoring/Coaching Program creation - there will be several retirements at Hamber over the next few years and as a result there will be new teachers who would benefit from the support. The same process could be in place for the student teachers.
- ❑ Professional Development works best when it is embedded in school improvement plans. The School Growth Committee and School Planning Council need to meet with the Professional Development Committee and communicate professional development needs related to the School Growth Plan for the coming year on an annual basis. That way there will be a comprehensive professional development plan to the direction for school improvement.
- ❑ Professional Growth Plan for teacher development as a pilot project for a small group of teachers at Hamber. Teachers will design their own professional learning plan that fits with the stage of their career and their own developmental needs. This professional growth plan coupled with the opportunity for mentorship will assist with sustainability and growth in the professional learning community.

- ❑ Collective Inquiry and Action Research orientation - Development of opportunities for groups to research together topics such as instruction, curriculum, assessment practices and strategies for improving teaching effectiveness. Use of action research to determine how well instructional practices are improving student learning.
- ❑ Study Group Development - teachers and administrators form study groups to exchange ideas, discuss school policy and read journal articles or books. The intent would be to meet one hour per week and research and practice new methods of meeting the needs of students.
- ❑ Cross Curricular - Thematic Curriculum development. Working together as a professional team to develop teaching strategies that changes the way curriculum is taught from the regular course content -subject driven conventional way to a more thematic, integrated strategy.
- ❑ Assessment for Learning/ As Learning/ Of Learning- creates a clear understanding of the differences in each of these types of assessment. Provide assessment training for specific staff and have those teachers become the trainers of effective assessment for the whole staff.

Charting the course of the learning community at Hamber

Eric Hamber Secondary School exhibits a culture that is one of collaboration and shared decision making. Not every school ethos exhibits the degree of readiness to move forward together as does Hamber and as a result the development of a professional learning community in the school is further

along than in most other schools. Eventually, due to this type of school culture, Hamber will be held up as an example of excellence in school improvement that can come about through collaboration.

Currently, the department heads are reading the most recent book by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Karhanek (2004) in preparation for the January Department Head retreat. One of the dialogues planned for the retreat will focus on the book entitled *Whatever It Takes - How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*. Each department head received a copy of the book two months prior to the retreat and have been asked some questions for reflection during their reading, which will be addressed during the retreat. The sharing of leadership in the school has permitted all teachers to participate in the learning community of the school in very profound ways. The department heads, for example, will lead the school through some important reflections around compelling questions posed within the readings. The expectation that the entire staff will focus on student learning through strong collaborative processes has now become the approach for all new initiatives in the school. There are great expectations for the spring retreat and all subsequent planning sessions in the future of the school. The development of the professional learning community at Hamber is not a program but rather a process that permits the school to successfully answer such questions as 'How will we respond when kids don't learn?' When all the answers and actions to these questions are systemically implemented as a follow up from such deeply focused

questions then the school will be described as a professional learning community.

If the collaborative successes that have been experienced together as a school are an indication of the significant impact a committed group of staff working toward a shared purpose can have on school improvement, then the Ministry of Education needs to take a close look at how they might assist schools to implement collaborative time into the school schedule. When true collaboration is described by a leading educational researcher as possibly being the tipping point that moves education away from massive reform, and therefore could become the most productive progress in the history of education, Ministries of Education should be listening. Until that happens, Hamber will continue to creatively find the time and opportunities for teachers to work together collaboratively while they build the schools capacity to improve learning situations for all students.

APPENDIX

The following is an extract from DuFour, R. and Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work - Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Services. Reprinted here by kind permission of the authors.

The school as a professional learning community: A scenario

How would these characteristics of a learning community play out in the day-to-day operation of a school? Consider the following scenario which illustrates the professional learning community at work:

Connie Donovan approached her first teaching assignment with all the anxiety and nervous trepidation of any first year teacher. She had been assured during her interview that her new school operated as a learning community that valued teacher collaboration. Nevertheless, the memory of her roommate's introduction to the teaching profession the year before was still fresh in her mind. Poor Beth had been assigned to teach one of the most difficult remedial courses in her school, classes filled with students who had failed the course in the past due to a variety of problems. Her orientation had consisted of a review of the employee manual and an overview of the teacher's contract by the principal on the morning before students were to arrive. Then she was given the key to her room, the teacher's edition of the textbook, and her class roster. The following day she faced her students (135 of them) for the first time. Her nine weeks of preparation as a student teacher had not prepared her for the difficulties she encountered, and there was no support system to help her. She was uncertain of how to respond to student misbehavior and apathy, and she had told Connie tearfully that she felt she was losing control of her class. Connie had watched Beth work far into the night, preparing lessons and grading papers, but each week Beth only seemed to become more discouraged and overwhelmed. Weekends offered no respite. Beth's teaching position had been contingent upon her willingness to serve as cheerleading sponsor, and Friday nights and Saturday's were spent supervising cheerleaders. By March, she had decided that she was not cut out for teaching. She dreaded each day and frequently called in sick. By the end of the year she had admitted to Connie that she felt like she was hanging on by her fingernails.

Connie was relieved to get a phone call that summer from Jim, a veteran member of the faculty of her new school, who had participated on the committee that had interviewed her for the position. Jim congratulated her on her

appointment to the social studies department, explained that he would be serving as her mentor during the course of her first year, and invited her to lunch to make introductions and answer any questions she might have. Her anxiety diminished somewhat when Jim told her that the school provided two full days of orientation and another three days for the faculty to work together before students arrived.

The new teacher orientation was nothing like what Beth had described. After introductions, the principal spent the morning explaining the history of the school. She carefully reviewed the school's vision statement, pointing out that it had been jointly developed by the faculty, administration, community members, and students. She explained that the statement described what the school was striving to become and highlighted recent initiatives that the school had undertaken to move closer to the ideal described in the vision. She then divided all the new teachers into small groups and asked them to identify any points of the vision statement that they felt needed clarification. The emphasis this principal gave to the vision statement made it clear to Connie that it was a major focus for the school.

Connie spent the afternoon with her department chairman and Jim. Together they provided an overview of the entire scope and sequence of the social studies department's curriculum. They also provided her with a course description that teachers had developed for each course, and they reviewed the essential outcomes all students were to achieve in the courses she was teaching. They explained further that these outcomes had been determined collectively by the teachers after considerable discussion and a lengthy review of the state's goals in social studies, the report on student achievement in social studies by the Nationals Assessment of Educational Progress, and the curriculum standards recommended by The National Council for the Social Studies and the National Center for History in the Schools. Finally, they reviewed the vision statement for the department that the teachers themselves had developed. They discussed the department's improvement goals and the priorities and demonstrated to Connie how she might make use of the department's common files in her own planning and assessment.

On the second day of orientation the principal introduced the president of the teachers' association who distributed and explained the faculty value statements. These statements had been developed by the faculty to give direction to the daily work of teachers. The association president pointed out the link between the value statements and the school's vision and explained that every group in the school- the Board of Education, administration, support staff, students, and parents- had articulated similar statements of the commitments they were prepared to make to improve the school.

The remainder of the morning was spent hearing from representatives of the different support services made available to teachers- the Deans, the director of the media center, the technology coordinator, the pupil personnel department,

the special education department, and the tutors from the resource centers. Each speaker emphasized that his or her function was to assist teachers. That afternoon, Connie's mentor helped her set up her classroom, asked what she hoped to accomplish on the first day and during the first week of class, and offered a few suggestions based on her response.

When the entire faculty arrived the next day, Connie was surprised to see that the entire morning was devoted to a celebration of the start of the school year. At the opening meeting, the principal announced milestones- weddings, births, engagements, advanced degrees, and other important events that faculty members had experienced over the summer. Each announcement was met with warm applause by the faculty. The principal then stressed several themes from the vision statement and reminded teachers of the priorities they had established for that school year. Each new faculty member was introduced to the group by his or her mentor, then given a faculty tee-shirt. The remainder of the morning was spent enjoying a festive school wide brunch complete with skits and entertainment presented by members of the faculty and administration. Connie was surprised and pleased to learn that this back-to-school celebration was an annual tradition completely planned and orchestrated by a faculty committee.

That afternoon it was down to business. Every teacher in the school had been appointed as a member of one or more teaching team. Connie was a member of the interdisciplinary team that included an English teacher and a science teacher. Together the three of them would share responsibility for seventy-five students. These students were assigned to Connie and her two colleagues for a three-hour block and would remain with the same three teachers for two full years. Connie was excited about this assignment. She believed in the benefits of integrated curriculum; she felt that long-term relationships with students would be beneficial, and she welcomed the idea of working closely with two colleagues who shared the same students. She was also enthusiastic about the fact that the teachers were free to schedule the three-hour block as they saw fit. Free from the limits of a fifty-minute period, she felt she could offer some interesting simulations and mock trials for her students. She spent the remainder of the day working with her colleagues to strengthen their first interdisciplinary unit. She appreciated the fact that they solicited her opinion and were receptive to her questions.

On the next day, Connie worked with her other team, the United States history team. All teachers who were responsible for teaching the same course were members of a team for that course. The teams developed common course descriptions, articulated the essential outcomes for the course, established the criteria for assessing the quality of student work, and developed common assessment instruments. The history team spent considerable time reviewing and grading examples of essays that students had written the year before. Connie found this practice particularly helpful in understanding both what the department emphasized and what were the criteria for evaluating student work. By the end

of the morning, the teachers were very consistent in the way they applied the departmental criteria to grading student work.

That afternoon the team analyzed the students' performance according to common assessment instruments from the previous year, identified areas where students did not meet the anticipated proficiencies established by the team, and discussed strategies for improving student performance. The discussion helped Connie to clarify what students were to accomplish, how they were to be assessed, and where they had experienced difficulties in the past. She found the discussion invaluable. She spent part of the third day of teacher preparation working with her teams and discussing with her mentor a few ideas she planned to use in her opening comments to students the next day. Finally, she spent the remainder of her day examining profiles of her new students.

Once the school year was underway, the new teachers continued to meet at least once each month for ongoing orientation. Sometimes teachers with particular interests or skills would talk to the group on activities in their classes. One of these sessions helped Connie solve a problem she had been having about how to structure individual accountability into cooperative learning activities. Other times the principal provided the new teachers with an article or case study and asked the new teachers to react in their personal journals. These reflections then became the basis for the group's discussion. The sessions always included an opportunity to ask questions. As the year went on, Connie found that her meetings with the new teachers enabled her to develop a sense of camaraderie and shared experience with them.

By the third week of school Connie had become concerned over one of her history students who seemed unwilling to work. Although he was not disruptive, Matthew seemed detached in class and rarely turned in any work. Connie spoke to him after class one day to express her concerns and to discuss possible ways to engage him in the classroom activity. When the conference failed to bring about any change, Connie raised the issue with Jim. He suggested alerting Matthew's student support team (SST). Teachers were not the only ones in the school to work in teams. A counselor, dean and social worker also shared responsibility for the same group of students. When Connie explained her concerns to Matthew's counselor, the SST decided to solicit information from all of his teachers. It soon became evident that the behavior pattern that Matthew had demonstrated in Connie's classroom was evident in all of his classes. The SST decided it was time to convene a parent conference to review Matthew's status both with his parents and teachers. At the conference the teachers jointly developed strategies that would enable Matthew's parents to be aware of his assignments. The parents promised to monitor their son carefully to ensure he would keep current with his work.

Jim trained Connie in the school's approach to classroom observation and teacher evaluation before the department chairmen and principal began the

formal process. She became comfortable having Jim observe her teaching and found her debriefing sessions with him to be very helpful. He explained that all the mentors had been trained in analyzing teaching and providing constructive feedback. Connie expected the principal to be more directive in the teacher evaluation process and anticipated she would receive some kind of rating at the conclusion of her conference with the principal. She was wrong on both accounts. The principal asked probing questions. "Why did you decide to teach his content? How did you now students had the prerequisite knowledge and skills to be successful in this unit? Why did you utilize the instructional strategies you selected? How do you know if students achieved the intended outcomes? What patterns do you see in your teaching? What worked and what didn't work in this lesson? If you were to teach this lesson again, would you do anything differently?" By the end of the conference, Connie realized that she had done most of the talking and that the principal was simply providing prompts to encourage her to be reflective and to articulate her conclusions about her teaching.

Connie was surprised to discover the number of action research projects going on in her department. Teachers were divided on the question of ability grouping. Some argued that remedial classes created a climate of low expectations and were harmful to students. They called for students to be grouped heterogeneously. Others argued that remedial classes offered the best strategy for meeting the special needs of students who had experienced trouble with social studies in the past. The teachers subsequently agreed to put their respective theories to the test. Remedial students were randomly assigned either to heterogeneous classes or to remedial classes, and the teachers agreed on the assessment strategies they would use at the end of the year to see which approach was more effective. In another project some teachers volunteered to increase their class size by twenty-five percent in order to reduce their teaching assignment from five sections to four, thus leaving more time for joint planning. Once again, teachers in the experimental and traditional classes had agreed on the criteria they would monitor to determine the effectiveness of each approach. Connie learned that action research was not limited to her department; in fact, each department had various action research projects underway. She also learned that the school had established a special entrepreneurial fund offering teachers opportunities to develop grant proposals for projects to improve the school. After a review by a faculty committee to determine which proposals offered the greatest promise, the School Board provided funding for the implementation of those proposals. It was obvious to Connie that experimentation played an important part in the culture of her new school.

Reflection and dialogue were also essential to the workings of the school. For example, all teachers, not just beginning instructors, benefited from peer observation. Teachers created reading clubs that reviewed and discussed books and major articles on teaching and learning. Faculty members participated in a portfolio development project based on the criteria identified by the National

Board of Professional Teaching Standards. Department meetings typically opened with a teacher sharing a strategy or insight with colleagues and then responding to questions. Connie was struck by the lively give and take of these discussions. She found that teachers felt comfortable in probing and challenging one another's thinking.

It was soon very evident that ongoing professional growth was expected at this school. The district offered three different areas of concentration: authentic assessment, student-centered learning, or multiple intelligences and teaching teams agreed to pursue one of these three professional development initiatives for at least three years. Connie's interdisciplinary team had already opted for authentic assessment. Each school year, five half days and two full days had been set aside for concentrated focus on these topics.

The faculty had committed themselves to make a concerted effort to integrate technology into the curriculum. They had agreed to adjust other budget areas in order to fund a full-time technology trainer. This trainer not only offered a regular schedule of technology classes for all staff during their preparation periods; she also provided one-on-one, just-in-time training as individual staff members identified a need. With the trainer's help Connie learned to log onto a social studies teachers group on the Internet. She enjoyed posting a question and soliciting ideas from colleagues around the world.

Each teacher in the school was asked to develop an individualized professional growth plan in an area of special interest. Connie decided to focus on effective questioning strategies and worked with her department chairman to develop a plan for investigating this topic. The chairman provided her with articles summarizing the research on questioning strategies, and the principal recommended several teachers who were particularly skilled in questioning for her to observe. During the next several weeks Connie implemented some of the strategies she had either read about or observed first hand. She also requested feedback on her questioning techniques from Jim after he had observed her teaching. The district also offered its own series of workshops and courses that were tied to district goals. Most of these classes were taught by local teachers or administrators. Connie took the course on questioning strategies as well as a series of courses on classroom management, and she received credit on the salary schedule for doing so. The district not only encouraged teachers to be active in their professional organizations; it also contributed toward the membership fee of approved organizations.

Connie joined both the National Council of Social Studies Teachers and its state affiliate. The principal, department chairman, and Connie's colleagues frequently distributed copies of journal articles that they found interesting, and team and department meetings were often devoted to the consideration and debate of these ideas presented in those articles. The district also published its own

professional journal once each year comprised exclusively of articles written by teachers in the district.

The district's partnership with a local college served as another stimulus for reflection and productive interchange. Undergraduate students in education were frequent observers and often served as teacher aides in the school. They were often filled with questions after observing a class. University staff often advised teachers in setting up action research projects. School staff reciprocated by taking part in the research of the university. Professors taught units in the high school, and many of the undergraduate and graduate education courses were team taught by university staff and a teacher from the district. Late in the year Connie was invited to reflect on her experience as a first-year teacher to a class of college students as they prepared for their student teaching assignment.

Connie was surprised when, shortly after she had accepted her teaching position, the personnel office asked her to complete a survey regarding her experience as a teaching candidate. As the year went on, she realized that surveys soliciting feedback were pervasive throughout the district. The principal and department chairmen distributed surveys to the staff for feedback on their performance. Teachers could choose from a variety of instruments that gave students the opportunity to provide their perceptions of the teacher and the class. All seniors were asked to complete a survey reflecting on their high school experience, and the school conducted a phone survey of randomly selected students one year and five years after their graduation to assess their high school experience and to determine their current status. Parents were surveyed annually to get their impressions of the school, and the principal and members of the Board participated in neighborhood coffees throughout the district to answer questions from members of the community and to receive feedback. Teachers completed annual surveys assessing the school's improvement efforts and identifying areas for improvement. They also completed self-evaluation forms on the functioning and effectiveness of their teams. It was clear that seeking and considering feedback on performance was the norm both within the school and throughout the district.

Connie considered her common planning time with the members of her interdisciplinary team and several of the members of her history team to be her most valuable resource. The members of the interdisciplinary team used some of their time to refine integrated curriculum units and to discuss how to apply what they were learning about authentic assessment. Much of this time was spent discussing the students they all shared, identifying individuals who seemed to be having a problem, and developing unified strategies for assisting those students. Since the history team did not share the same students, their discussions focused more on ideas for teaching particular units and assessing students' understanding in general.

At the end of the semester, Connie worked with her teams in analyzing the results of student performance on the common comprehensive assessments the

teams had developed. First, they compared the students' achievement to the anticipated proficiency levels the teams had set. They then compared the results to their longitudinal study of past student performance. They identified areas of concern and then brain stormed steps that they might take to improve the level of student achievement. Finally, they wrote a brief summary of their analysis and improvement plan and sent copies to the principal and their department chairman.

Connie felt there was never enough time to do everything that was required, but she appreciated the efforts the school had made to provide teachers with the time to plan, reflect, and collaborate. In addition to the teacher planning days at the start of the year, the five half days and three full days set aside for professional development, and the common preparation periods allocated for teaching teams, time was set aside on the first school day of each week for team collaboration. The standard school day for teachers was 7:45 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. with classes scheduled from 8:05 a.m. to 2:25 p.m. But on the first day of each week teacher reported to their team meetings at 7:30 a.m. and the first class began at 8:30. A variety of options were provided to students while teachers were meeting in their teams. The cafeteria was open for breakfast. Students could report to tutorial centers, the library, computer labs, quiet study hall, open gym, or the weight room. They could make up tests or assignments in the testing center, visit the college counseling office, or meet with their counselors, social workers, or deans. Those who could arrange their own transportation could simply arrive on campus later as long as they were on time for their first class. If a team required still more time for collaboration, the principal provided substitutes for those teachers so they could meet during the school day. She had enlisted a corps of parent volunteers who would substitute for this purpose as needed.

That spring, teaching teams were invited to develop proposals for summer curriculum projects. The proposal form called upon each team to describe what they wanted to accomplish, how the project connected to departmental and school visions, and what the project would produce. The interdisciplinary team submitted a proposal for creating two units that linked American literature, United States history, and scientific principles. After the faculty committee that reviewed the project proposals approved the plan, the team coordinated their calendars to find a week during the summer break when everyone would be available.

On three different occasions during the year Connie participated in small group discussions of proposals that had been developed by different school improvement task forces. The task forces- composed of teachers, parents and students- were convened in order to generate strategies for addressing priorities that had already been identified by the school. One task force submitted a proposal to increase student participation in co-curricular activities. Another offered strategies to teach students to accept increasing responsibility for their learning as they advanced from freshman to senior year. The third proposed a systematic way of monitoring each student's academic progress and responding

to any student in danger of failing. Each group included the criteria by which the impact of their recommendations should be assessed in the long term. Connie learned that every teacher in the school was expected to participate in these improvement task forces at one time or another, and that one of the primary responsibilities of each task force was to work toward a clear consensus supporting its recommendations. It became apparent that proposals often had to go through several drafts before that consensus could be established.

At the end of the school year, Jim asked Connie to reflect on her overall experience. She acknowledged that not every lesson went well and that there had been days when she was frustrated and perplexed. Teaching had turned out to be much more difficult and complex than she had ever imagined. She had expected her enthusiasm for history to be contagious and that her students would learn to love the subject just as she had. She now had to acknowledge that some did not seem to care for history at all, and she wondered why she had been unable to generate their enthusiasm. She had been certain that she would be able to reach every student, and when one of her students elected to withdraw from school saying "This school sucks!" she questioned why she had been unable to connect with him. She admitted she was not clear where her responsibility for student learning ended and where the student's began. She often asked herself if she were doing too much or not enough to help each student to be successful in her class. She had been quite certain she knew all the answers when she decided to become a teacher, but as this first year of actual experience went on, she felt as though she had more questions than answers. It was not until the second semester that she came to realize that good teaching was driven by such questions. She gradually came to a clearer understanding and appreciation of the section of the school's vision statement that said, "We will be a school that is noted for two characteristics: our commitment to promoting the success of every student and our continuous discontent with the immediate present." In her school the process of searching for answers was more important than having answers. It was clear that every teacher was called upon to ask each day, "How can we be more effective in our efforts to be a positive influence in the lives of the students entrusted to us?" Yet, it was equally clear that teachers were never to conclude that they had arrived at the definitive answer to any fundamental question. The year had been exhilarating and exhausting, fun and frustrating, but at its end, despite all the unanswered questions, there was one thing of which Connie was certain- her life would most certainly be spent teaching!

REFERENCES

- Barth, R. (1990). *Improving schools from within: Teachers, parents and principals can make a difference*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bryk, A. and Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Conzemius, A and O'Neill, J. (2002). *The handbook for SMART school teams*. Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Services.
- Coombs, A.W., Miser, A.B., and Whitaker, K.S. (1999). *On becoming a school leader: A person-centered challenge*. Alexandria, VA; Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Cuban, L. and Tyack, D. (1995). *Tinkering toward Utopia: A century of public school reform*. Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard Press.
- DuFour, R. (2003). 'Collaboration Lite' puts student achievement on a starvation diet. *National Staff Development Council*. Vol. 24, No.4 pp. 63-64.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., and Eaker, R. (2002). *Getting Started - Reculturing schools to become professional learning communities*. Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Services.
- DuFour, R. and Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work - Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Services.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., and Karhanek, G. (2004). *Whatever it takes - How professional learning communities respond when kids don't learn*. Bloomington, Indiana: National Education Services.
- Eastwood, K. and Louis, K.S. (1992). *Restructuring that lasts: Managing the performance dip*. *Journal of School Leadership*. 2(2), 213-224.
- Fullan, M. and Stiegelbauer, S. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M. and Miles, M. (June 1992). 'Getting reform right: what works and what doesn't.' *Phi Delta Kappan*: 745-752
- Fullan, M. 'Turning Systemic Thinking on Its Head', *Phi Delta Kappan*, February, 1996, p 421

- Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers work and culture in the postmodern age*. Toronto: OISE Press.
- Hord, S. (2004). *Learning together, leading together- Changing schools through professional learning communities*. New York, NY.: Teachers College Press
- Kouzes, J. and Posner, B. (1990). *The leadership challenge: How to get extraordinary things done in organizations*. San Fransisco: Jossey - Bass.
- Kruse, S.D., Louis, K.S., and Bryk, A. (1995). *An emerging framework for analyzing school based professional community*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin
- Lieberman, A.(1999) *The work of restructuring schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Little, J. (1990). 'The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teachers professional relations.' *Teachers College Record*, 91 (4), 509- 536.
- McLaughlin, M. (1995, December). *Creating professional learning communities*. Keynote address presented at the annual conference of the National Staff Development Council, Chicago.
- Myers, C.B. and Simpson, D.J. (1998). *Re-creating schools: Places where everyone learns and likes it*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin
- National Education Services - Workbook Handout 22. (1999) *Collaboration Survey*: Bloomington, Indiana.
- Newmann, F.M. and Wehlage, G.G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A report to the public and educators*. Madison, WI: Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, University of Wisconsin.
- Raywid, M., (September 1993). *Finding Time for Collaboration*. *Educational Leadership* p. 30-34
- Roberts, S.M. and Pruitt, E.Z.(2003). *Schools as professional learning communities -Collaborative activites and strategies for professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin
- Schmoker, M. (1996). *Results: The key to continuous school improvement*. Alexandria, VA. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Schmoker, M. (2000). *The Results we want*. *Educational Leadership*, 57 (5), 62-65
- Schmoker, M. (2001). *The results fieldbook. Practical strategies from dramatically improved schools*. Alexandria, VA. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

- Schmoker, M. (2004). 'Tipping Point: From Feckless Reform to Substantive Instructional Improvement.' *Phi Delta Kappan*, February 2004. p 424-432.
- Speck, M. (1999). *The principalship: Building a learning community*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Stoll, L. (March 2004). International insights on school improvement: A day of dialogue, reflection and sharing. Network of inquiring performance - based schools' presentation, Surrey Conference Center, British Columbia.
- Stoll, L. Wallace, M., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Thomas, S., Hawkey, K., Smith, M., Greenwood, A. and Stobert, C. (2003) *Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities: Questions arising from the literature and how they are being addressed in the project*. DFES Research Brief RBX 12 -03.