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Collaboration Project

1   Introduction

Each year, a rule I instill in my classroom is to leave people happier than when you met them, and I uphold the same mentality. It is vital to build relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators to best support our students. One person alone can only do so much, but with united with a team, the results can be unmatched. As noted in our text, "...professionals in virtually every discipline have realized that there is simply too much to know and understand, too much to complete and accomplish for individuals to succeed in isolation" (p. 5). The objective of this project was to examine a series of interactions and analyze the depth and quality of conversation.

My collaboration log spans five days and documents twenty-five interactions. My interactions include face-to-face interactions, emails, phone calls, and messages from my Remind app. The Remind app is a way for me to quickly and easily communicate with parents, which breaks down barriers and makes it easy to connect with me. Over the twenty-five interactions, I collaborated with parents, teachers, and administration. I presented a mixture of both satisfying and dissatisfying interactions.

2   Reflection

2.1   Satisfied Interaction Reflection

The foundation of collaboration is communication, and as outlined by Friend and Cook, communication is "the management of messages within the objective of creating meaning" (p. 27). In all my interactions, there were levels of perspective and perception used to decipher meaning; through this process, some of the noted interactions were strengthened, while others hindered the level of potential collaboration. Friend and Cook define collaboration as "a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p.5). With the knowledge gained from Friend and Cook, I analyzed the interactions between myself, my school staff, and my student's parents. When examining the previously mentioned twenty-five documented interactions, I noted that eight left me feeling very satisfied and eleven satisfied.

Throughout this process, I often had to stop and ask myself what makes a conversation satisfying because, to be honest, I have never considered this question. Additionally, I wondered what makes a quality conversation lead to a positive collaboration? Throughout the examination of my interactions coupled with the defining characteristics of collaboration outlined in chapter one, I identified components of collaborative characteristics exhibited in my most satisfying interactions. For example, on January 25, 2022, I documented interactions with my school's

family-home coordinator. She and I discussed one of my second-grade student's frequent tardiness. We collaborated and found a reward system we both were eager and optimistic about; additionally, we left the conversation on a positive note where we both felt valued and heard. Through this interaction, we demonstrated parity, mutual goals, and sharing of resources, all qualities that lead to the defining characteristics of collaborations as set forth by Friend and Cook. Because the conversation was built on mutual goals, parity, and the sharing of resources, we both felt respected and valued. Interactions like the one mentioned are the most beneficial to both parties and the student.

When I examined some of my other satisfying interactions, I noticed that there is always a level of mutual respect and listening. My teammates, specifically, do a great job of listening and responding to each other, which is why I believe our team is so effective. Friend and Cook explain that "for professionals, accurate and effective listening can make the difference between strong partnerships or unfortunate misunderstandings"(p.57). Some of the listening strategies displayed in our positive interactions were that we do our best to eliminate distractions by not bringing our phones and avoiding interruptions. As detailed on January 25, 2022, my teammates and I had our weekly meeting. We usually meet in the morning in one of our classrooms with the door shut to avoid interruptions. These meetings are highly valuable and make collaboration and sharing materials a seamless experience.

An aspect of collaboration and communication that is equally vital is ensuring there are no power struggles of individuals who think they are better. On January 31, 2022, I documented a meeting with my principal, teammates, building interventionist, and our lower elementary special education teacher. I rated this meeting with a four, very satisfying. I feel blessed to have a supportive principal who emphasizes the importance of relationships and collaboration. Friend and Cook highlight the role of the principal in communication by stating, "Principals are emphasizing that teachers should work with each other to solve problems about students experiencing difficulty, to establish academic standards, and to create positive working relationships…" (p.14). This is why we have regular data meetings. During these meetings, we address concerns and work as a team to identify students needing additional help.

Furthermore, my principal fosters positive collaboration by upholding parity and not undermining the expertise of the teachers. If my principal utilized his legitimate power and made teachers feel less valuable, we would not have the same level of collaboration. As described by Friend and Cook, "As perceived differences in power increase, the likelihood for true collaboration decreases" (p. 19). As noted in my collaboration log, all my interactions, including my principal, were rated a three or a four. This is due to his ability to value each member and not use any legitimate power against his staff.

2.2   **Dissatisfied Interaction Reflection (1-2 pages)**

As much as we would all love every interaction to be perfect, we know this is not the case. Unfortunately, there are times when I am unsatisfied with the interactions I have within my school context. Out of my twenty-five interactions, six of them fell into the dissatisfied or very

dissatisfied range. Friend and Cook claim, "Despite collaboration's clear importance and increasing emphasis in education, a number of challenges may arise when school professionals attempt to establish collaborative relationships"(p.16); when we consider the main struggles within a collaboration, Friend and Cook outline four main categories; school culture, professional socialization, power in relationships, and pragmatic issues. All of these play key roles in collaboration, and when one category fails, it often makes the interaction less desirable. Furthermore, these undesirable interactions lead to other complicated interactions.

One interaction I noted that left me feeling very dissatisfied was a teacher next door to my room. She is a veteran teacher who has been in the profession since I was born. Naturally, she is a wonderful teacher with tactful management and clear expectations. She often reminds others of her years of experience. She utilizes what Friend and Cook refer to as referent power to gain control of a conversation. On January 31, 2022, I documented that my students were in the gym (in the classroom), and the teacher, next door to me, was bothered by the noise level. Naturally, I was apologetic but explained the situation, she was not interested in what I was saying, and I could tell from her nonverbal cues. As described, "The body says what words cannot" (p. 55). She was standoff-ish and cracked her door, we had a more considerable spatial distance than I would have liked, and she limited my talking time. This interaction was very dissatisfying and left me feeling horrible. Additionally, I now have no desire to collaborate with this individual. I would have preferred if she had listened to my side of the situation and did not use presumption against me because I am a new and young teacher. I am not a fan of conflict, avoiding it like the plague, so this interaction stirred me up and honestly left me feeling uncomfortable. I typically present an avoidance style in response to conflict and did so with this interaction.

Another dissatisfying interaction was with my school's speech and language pathologist. Although there wasn't a power struggle, I did feel we were on different pages and not working toward a mutual goal. In this situation, on January 27, 2022, I asked if my student could continue services with her and the student's special education times. She was quick and short in her response. She was not open to conversation or examination of mutual goals. It was made clear that this was the new plan and that there was no budging. The lack of our mutual goal made this interaction challenging and dissatisfying. Friend and Cook relate to this by stating collaboration "can only exist voluntarily in situations in which individuals with parity have identified a mutual goal and are willing to share responsibility for key decisions…" (p. 22). The interaction I documented did not have an identified mutual goal, and there was no willingness to share the responsibility for decision-making for my student.

3   Action Plan

Being reflective on these interactions, I found myself quick to judge the other participant. It is always easy to find ways others can improve; however, it takes far more introspection to examine collaboration participation. Friend and Cook describe that it is vital to understand collaborations to "set appropriate expectations for yourself" (p.5). When reviewing the

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twenty-five interactions detailed in my collaboration log, I was able to find trends. Almost all of the lowest-rated interactions relate to power imbalances. I wonder what level of my perception this impacts; do I mentally perceive myself as inferior, so when the conversation does not go how I want it to, I blame them for using their power and experience against me? Also, I entered many of those conversations with plans of how I wanted them to end with rehearsed conversations in tow. As Friend and Cook uncovered, joining a discussion with a rehearsed response can lead to "a serious risk of resulting in you missing essential information" (p.61). I believe my most prominent areas to work on are effective listening and managing my perceptions of others' thoughts of myself as an educator.

3.1   Strategy 1.

The first strategy to improve my collaboration level is to employ better active and effective listening skills. One way to do this is by avoiding prejudgements. By avoiding prejudgements, I will be enhancing both weaknesses I noted previously. One way to ensure I am entering conversations with limited rehearsal is by looking through the materials before the meeting and joining with an open mindset rather than expectations.

To achieve this, I will use the table below and begin intentionally analyzing my conversation pre and post. I will add up weekly totals and hopefully see a decline with more intention on this skill. I will plan to reflect after a month and adjust if needed.

Pre-Meeting Checklist:	Post-Meeting Checklist:	Weekly Totals
☐ Data/ materials reviewed	☐ Listened attentively	
☐ Opened minded to the outcomes	☐ Did not rehearse a response while the other individual was talking.	

3.2   Strategy 2.

The next strategy to improve my collaboration with my fellow school staff is through managing my perceptions. I think I perceive comments much harsher than in reality. I typically overanalyze everything and want every interaction to be overly positive and end with everyone happy. To help achieve this, I am going to analyze my personal state. I want to do this in two ways: before conversations, I want to repeat some self-affirmations reminding myself of my worth and value as an educator. Additionally, I want to repeat self-affirmations after a conversation to calm my nerves and center myself with the conversation. I will use the chart

below and reflect weekly to chart these and see the effectiveness. Additionally, I will use the rating system seen below.

Pre-Affirmation: I am worthy of being heard and understood. I am a professional who worked equally as hard to be a part of this team. Therefore, my ideas and feelings are just as valid as the individuals around me.

Post-Afftirimation: I can do nothing to change the past; what is done is done. My ideas and feelings were just as valid and important as the individuals around me.

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1- I did not manage my perceptions
2- I somewhat managed my perceptions
3- I managed my perceptions

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	Monday Conversation Rating	Tuesday Conversation Rating	Wednesday Conversation Rating	Thursday Conversation Rating	Friday Conversation Rating
☐ Pre-Affirmation					
☐ Post-Affirmation					

4   Collaboration Log

Collaboration Log					
Date/Time	**Who**	**How**	**What**	**Rating (1-4)**	**Notes**
January 25, 2022, 8:20 am	Grade-Level Teammates	F2F	Weekly Plan	4	Overall, it went smoothly. We sat within proximity and planned for the upcoming week. Both of my teammates had been out for COVID the past two weeks, so it was lovely to reconnect. We are struggling as grade-level

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					teaching the math curriculum, as we believe it is too hard for our kids, so we have been adapting and were able to share some joys.
January 25, 2022, 9:10 am	Parent	Message	Pick-up work	3	Messaged a parent to pick up their child's weekly packet. The parent promptly replied and thanked me for all my work.
January 25, 2022, 11:20 am	Parent	Email	Work	2	Emailed a parent about course work and received no response.
January 25, 2022, 12:12 pm	Principal SLP SPE Teacher Interventionist	Email	Referral for SPE	4	After what has felt like a lot of fighting, my student is finally being referred for testing! I am beyond happy; the messages were quick, concise, and offered hope that they will be in next week.
January 25, 2022, 3:20 pm	Family-Home Coordinator	F2F	Student	4	We discussed my one student's tardiness. We talked about reward systems, and I felt very much on the same page. It was nice to be heard and understood. We left feeling optimistic.
January 26, 2022, 11:45 am	Teammate	F2F	Math Curriculum	3	I spoke with one of my teammates about piloting math next year. I don't necessarily want to, but I do not like our current curriculum. She told me she was going to do the pilot because she is the grade level chairperson. I am alright with this outcome.

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January 26, 2022, 12:10 pm	Parent	Email	Absences	3	I went back and forth about why the student was absent. We discussed some challenges their family is facing. I connected them to the family-home coordinator. Also, I shared academic growth with the family.
January 26, 2022, 1:25 pm	Secretary	F2F	Student	3	I went to make copies in the office, and my secretary and I shared a conversation about a regularly tardy student. She said she would start inputting her tardies, so I don't have to.
January 26, 2022, 1:55 pm	Computer Lab Manager	F2F	Chromebook Problems	4	I went to the computer lab and talked to our lab manager about a couple of issues I have been having with our Chromebook. She showed me some troubleshooting methods and printed me a reference guide for later use.
January 26, 2022, 3:55 pm	Family-Home Coordinator Principal	F2F	Student	3	I have a student who unexpectedly up and moved to Yemen today…It is very strange, and I have several questions but no answers. I feel frustrated that I was not informed and overall confused. I spoke with my principal and family home coordinator about this issue, and they also were not informed.

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January 27, 2022, 8:43 am	Secretary	F2F	Student	1	I went to talk to my secretary about my student that moved to Yemen. I asked several questions about marking his absences and asked her to reach out throughout the upcoming days. She told me to ask the family-home coordinator to do that because she is too busy.
January 27, 2022, 9:00 am	Parents	Message	Work Pick-up	3	I sent a message to my parents with students out to come to get their work. Everyone replied, and one parent thanked me for my extra work.
January 27, 2022, 11:00 am	SPE Teacher SLP	Email	Student	2	Now that my student is receiving SPE services, his SLP wants to drop back down to the minimum support. I feel that we are just scratching the surface of progress and feel defeated by this. The SPE teacher also wished to continue his intense speech intervention schedule, but the SLP was adamant about not meeting that many days to support LRE.
January 27, 2022, 12:05 pm	SPE Teacher	F2F	Student	4	I went to speak with the SPE teacher about the email thread. She felt the same way. I also expressed my concerns that my student will be losing his reading intervention time. She agreed. I asked if the student could stay in the reading group and just drop some speech sessions. We were on the same

					page, and she plans to advocate with the principal to keep the intervention placement.
January 27, 2022, 3:55 pm	Parent	Phone	Behavior	3	I called a parent about their child hitting another student. The family was responsive, and I felt like we concluded positively. I am optimistic the child will not hit again.
January 28, 2022, 8:25 am	Principal SPE Teacher	Email	Student	4	This morning, I received confirmation that everyone agrees to keep the reading intervention for my student! I am beyond happy about this and feel it is the right thing for my student.
January 28, 2022, 8:45 am	Teammates	F2F	Groundhog's Day	4	My teammates and I went over some groundhog's day activities that we might want to use. It is nice having a team that shares materials and ideas. My one teammate shared how thankful she was for our team, and we ended our meeting with materials and ideas.
January 28, 2022, 11:45 am	Parent	Email	Absences	2	I emailed a parent of my student that moved to Yemen. I reached out to see if I could get a confirmation/ a timeline, as I have heard that they might come back at some point. The family has not replied.
January 28, 2022, 11:50 am	Parents	Email	Tardiness	2	I reached out to a parent about their child's tardies. I asked if I could do anything to help and explained the importance of

					being at school on time. No reply.
January 28, 2022, 2:50 pm	Reading Interventionist	F2F	Student Progress	3	I spoke briefly with our interventionist about a couple of my student's progress. She was able to share some insight and share growth from some of our students. She offered some ideas for me to implement into my small group times.
January 31, 2022, 8:20 am	Principal Teammates Interventionist SPE Teacher	F2F	Data Meeting	4	We had our data meeting this morning; it was productive and positive. It was nice to see and hear all the interventions we have been implementing. It felt good to celebrate the growth and analyze our lower learners. We were all on the same page, and there was a positive energy throughout.
January 31, 2022, 8:58 am	Parents	Message and Email	Toys	3	I sent out an email and message about the abundance of toys in the classroom. I reminded them of the issues they were causing and explained it is wasting learning time. I got a couple of replies, and everyone was super supportive! I am hopeful to see a reduction in toys.
January 31, 2022, 12:00 pm	ESL Coordinator	Phone	Services	3	I reached out to my student's ESL teacher because the student has received several days of support, and now, he is gone, and I did not want her to come if the student is gone. We chatted, and she shared that she

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					would try to reach out to the family.
January 31, 2022, 1:30 pm	Teacher next door	F2F	Gym	1	The teacher next door complained that my students were too loud today. I asked what time, and she told me the time. Unfortunately, my students were in the "gym," but it was in my classroom. I explained the situation to her and told her she would talk to the gym teacher about his management, not mine. I also apologized profusely. She brushed me off, and we went our separate ways.
January 31, 2022, 3:52 pm	Secretary	F2F	Student	3	I talked to the secretary about marking my student in Yemen's absences as excused or unexcused. She said she would handle it and thanked me for reminding her about the situation.

Reference

Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2017). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals*. Boston: Pearson Education.