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**A CASE STUDY INVESTIGATION OF
TEACHER COLLABORATION:
CONDITIONS AND THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN TEACHER COLLABORATION
AND TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the conditions that promote or inhibit teacher collaboration, and its implications for teachers' professional development and learning by using a qualitative case study approach. The investigation is based on research studies (Leonard & Leonard, 2001; Leonard, 1999; Hargreaves, 1997, 1994, 1993; little, 1993, 1990, 1987), which indicate that cultures of collaboration have positive and systematic connections to teachers' sense of efficacy, professional standard of practices, and students' learning. Understanding the conditions that encourage or inhibit teachers' collaboration in their work is essential to teachers' workplace learning and the improvement of their professional practices.

The outcomes of teachers' professional learning, as indicated by the findings of this study, depend to a large extent on the capability and efforts of teachers to engage in joint work and consultation with colleagues and the school culture that values and facilitates teachers' professional learning. Creating collaborative learning opportunities that encourage the free exchange of ideas among teachers through joint work, collegial interaction, dialogue, and participation, are important for developing teachers' capacity in cognitive reasoning and critical reflection.

This study adopted a multiple data gathering approach which include using open-ended questionnaires and in-depth, focus interviewing as a means for gathering data about the issues being investigated. St. Aloysius College in Adelaide, which was considered to have the capacity for developing a collaborative school culture, was chosen as the site for conducting the field work. Seventy-six copies of the

questionnaires were distributed to all teaching staff in the school, and about half of the staff members completed the questionnaires. The participants for interview included the school Principal, a Deputy Principal, a year-level coordinator who taught in different subject areas, and two teachers who taught different subjects at different year levels. The researcher adopted approaches of inductive analysis, constant comparison and typological analysis throughout the data analysis and writing-up process.

This research portfolio comprises of three parts with an introduction and conclusion to the whole portfolio. Part I of the portfolio includes the review of literature and the research methodology for part II and III. Part II is the investigation of the conditions that promote or inhibit teacher collaboration. Part III of the research portfolio is the investigation of the relationship between teacher collaboration and teachers' professional development and learning.

The findings support the claims that teachers' collaboration can be fostered by the organisational structures and leadership practices through delegating decision making authority for teachers to take on leadership responsibility. One significant aspect of the findings is that teachers need to model and practice collaborative style of working with colleagues, in order to set examples for students to engage collaboratively in group work. In addition, school leaders also need to model the collaborative style of working in order to inspire teachers to be involved in collaborative practices. The modelling of collaborative practices by teachers and administrators in the school helps in creating a conducive learning environment that benefits both teachers' professional practices and students' learning.

This study suggests that a safe, cooperative, and unthreatening environment in which teachers feel safe to voice their concerns without fear of disapproval, is an important condition for teachers involvement in collaborative practices. The findings also suggest that assuming shared responsibility for teaching and students' learning encourages teachers to work together as a team, where they can discuss issues, contribute ideas, plan, assess and evaluate teaching programmes together for the best possible learning outcomes for students.

In terms of the relationship between teachers' participation in collaborative practices and their professional development and learning, this study concludes that being involved in a variety of collaborative activities, the opportunities for exposure to a wider range of educational and instructional problems, accompanied by an open, supportive, visionary, and committed leadership, and a safe and collaborative work environment, are key factors for teachers' collaboration. They established the norms and social context for teachers' involvement in collegial interaction and collaborative practices that helped in promoting teachers' practical knowledge, skills and expertise, as well as critical thinking and reflective practice in their work.