

The Experience of Middle Grade Teachers in a Culture of Collaboration

Authors : Tamara Tallman

Abstract : Collaboration is a powerful tool for professional development and central for creating opportunities for teachers to reflect on their practice. However, school districts continue to have difficulty both implementing and sustaining collaboration. The purpose of this research was to investigate the experience of the teacher in a creative, instructional collaboration. The teachers in this study found that teacher-initiated collaboration offered them trust and they were more open with their partners. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was used for this study as it told the story of the teacher's experience. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was chosen for this study to capture the complex and contextual nature of the teacher experience from a creative, instructional collaborative experience. This study sought to answer the question of how teachers in a private, faith-based school experience collaboration. In particular, the researcher engaged the study's participants in interviews where they shared their unique perspectives on their experiences in relation to this phenomenon. Through the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis, the researcher interpreted the experiences of each participant in an attempt to gain deeper insight into how teachers made sense of their understanding of collaboration. In addition to the researcher's interpreting the meaning of this construct for each research participant, this study gave a voice to the individual experiences and positionality of each participant at the research site. Moreover, the key findings presented in this study shed light on how teachers within this particular context participated in and made sense of their experience of creating an instructional collaborative. The research presented the findings that speak to the meaning that each research participant experienced in their relation to participating in building a collaborative culture and its effect on professional and personal growth. The researcher provided recommendations for future practice and research possibilities. The research findings demonstrated the unique experiences of each participant as well as a connection to the literature within the field of teacher professional development. The results also supported the claim that teacher collaboration can facilitate school reform. Participating teachers felt less isolation and developed more teacher knowledge.

Keywords : collaboration, personal growth, professional development, teachers

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