

**INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM TEACHING AND  
FEELINGS OF TEACHER EFFICACY:  
A REFLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF ONE MIDDLE SCHOOL TEAM  
EXPERIENCE**

Or

**THE JOY OF TEACHING IN TEAMS**

**SANDRA JOAN EVANS**

B.A., McMaster University, 1976  
B.Ed., Queens' University, 1977

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my interdisciplinary team members, Lesley and Brooke with whom I have shared the best teaching experience of my career. I also dedicate this to my husband Mike, and my daughter Lauren, two other outstanding team members. Thank you for your patience.

## Abstract

This project examines my team teaching experience and my own feelings of teacher efficacy, as well as those of my team, in a formal and comprehensive way. It is a reflective, narrative case study account of my team's increased feelings of job satisfaction and feelings of effectiveness as educators as we engaged in interdisciplinary team teaching. It tells of the reason for the formation of our team as an attempt to better meet the learning needs of integrated occupational students in a regular grade seven classroom. While engaged in the process of preparing formal presentations to help others understand what we were doing, we came to a realization that the engagement in interdisciplinary team teaching had a tremendous affect on us as teachers, most especially in our feelings of teacher effectiveness. This work examines the feelings, accounts and stories of the teachers involved in our interdisciplinary teaching team and connects them with the accounts related in the literature. It is hoped that others will come to see the benefits of this type of educational setting as a way to help increase their own feelings of job satisfaction.

Preface

T. E. A. M.

Together Everyone Achieves More

or

The Joy of Working in Teams

## Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge all the assistance I received while completing this work, my supervisors, professors, and the Foothills School Division Masters' Cohort.

What a team!

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## Chapter I

### Background to the Project

During the 1998-1999 school year it became necessary to examine the effectiveness of the way Senator Riley School, (High River, Alberta) was implementing the provincial Integrated Occupations Program (I.O.P.) curriculum to students in grades seven and eight. This need arose out of feelings of teacher dissatisfaction with present methods. At the time of these discussions, students who were identified as being in the I.O.P. program were integrated in the regular classrooms, with special programming being provided by an Individual Program Plan (IPP) and with supports provided in the form of Learning Support Teacher <sup>1</sup>consultation and learning assistant time, shared among many classrooms and students. At the same time, Senator Riley's school jurisdiction, Foothills School Division, was looking at new ways to offer I.O.P. programming in a regional manner. The plan was to have feeder schools send students to Senator Riley for I.O.P. programming. The time had come for school personnel to begin to look at new ways to provide effective I.O.P. programming in order to meet the needs of all learners.

The original concept for the way I.O.P. programming had been set up had, and continues to have, a great deal of merit. The Senator Riley School staff had afforded a great deal of consideration to the notion of inclusion in order to reduce the stigma so often associated with students in this type of adapted program. Our original practice had been to integrate the "I.O.P. students" into the regular classroom setting and have the

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<sup>1</sup> A Learning Support Teacher is a teacher who works as a member of the school staff whose job it is to support classroom teachers in implementing student Individual Program Plans.

teachers and support staffs make the necessary program accommodations to allow these students to experience success. An additional component of “Work Study” was added to the program to help address the particular “hands on” focus necessary to these students’ learning.

In my role as Learning Support Teacher, I felt that many aspects of this type of programming proved to be very effective, particularly the “work study” portion. Teachers had found that in some cases we did not really need to make many accommodations and so were more able to keep the students in the regular stream, something that would not have been possible in a segregated setting. This did not happen too often, however, and the school staff felt that we needed to make more accommodations in addition to regular program modifications and intermittent in-class support to allow all our students the chance to be successful. The task of modifying the curriculum had proved very difficult, a task larger than we had been able to accomplish as originally configured. Teachers were not satisfied with the way we were implementing our I.O.P. program and were looking for alternatives.

There was a temptation to suggest that we move the students we could not accommodate to another setting in another community. This solution would have addressed some of the students’ learning needs but would have negatively affected the social and emotional needs of the majority of students in need of an alternate program. This, along with renewed divisional discussions about reconfiguring the occupations program, prompted me as Learning Support Teacher to think about an alternative way to offer the Integrated Occupations Program in our school.



Two essential considerations played an important part in formulating my proposal for a new way to offer the integrated occupations program in our school. First, I needed to address students' unique learning styles and, second, I felt it was preferred that students remain in their home schools.

When I considered the students who had been placed in our occupations program previously, I looked closely at the kind of learners they were. Most, but certainly not all, had a learning disability of some sort. More significantly, however, was the fact that they were, for the most part, kinaesthetic learners. I had not formally assessed them on their multiple intelligence strengths but I would venture to say that none of them had the linguistic or logical mathematical intelligence as a strength. Much of the regular instruction in our schools favours students who have linguistic and mathematical strength. There also seems to be fewer opportunities for more active learning as students progress through the higher grades. It was easy to see why we could say that I.O.P. students would not fit into a regular setting. Teachers recognized that these few students needed a different approach but the logistics of modifying so much for so few made the task too daunting.

I began to look for ways to provide programming for these students that would take into account the unique learning styles of all students in a class, not just a few. For this reason, I believed that we no longer needed to label these students as I.O.P. students but, rather, we could attend to them by thinking about their learning styles.

I proposed to place all the students who had a need for "hands on" programming in two classrooms. I expected that, at our school, this would be approximately between three to five students per classroom. We were lucky enough to have classrooms with

removable walls. This flexibility of space was vital to my proposal because I wanted to combine the two homerooms for all core instruction. I planned to support this teaching team by adding a third teacher who would otherwise have been assigned to the segregated I.O.P. class. Together, members of this teaching team would plan lessons to address the varied learning styles of students in both classrooms. Teachers and students would work together in constantly changing, flexible groupings. It would be vital to the success of this approach to give the teaching team adequate in-school planning and communication time to facilitate the fluidity of the groupings.

I felt that if we were able to meet students' needs in the way outlined above, there would no longer be a need to send students to another community for effective programming. This, therefore, met my other important criterion for desirable programming, having students stay in their home community. Students would be able to remain with their peer group for option courses, physical education classes, team sports, drama club and all other extracurricular activities offered at the middle school. Parents seemed to prefer to have their children remain in their home communities, something that had deterred them from having their children bussed to alternate programs in the past.

More importantly, the interdisciplinary team-teaching scenario allowed students to remain in their own classrooms. Students at the grade seven and eight levels are very sensitive to the perceptions of their peers and to conformity (despite their apparent lack of conformity to adult expectations). My school administrator and I both believed that segregated classes in home schools could be so devastating to self-esteem that the benefits of appropriate programming would be lost. In my interdisciplinary team teaching

idea, all students would be part of a setting where constantly changing groupings and instructors would be the norm, not the exception.

My vision for this form of program delivery began by combining two classrooms and having all three teachers responsible for the teaching of core courses and learning of the students in both rooms. Teachers in our school division's segregated I.O.P. classes have identified small class size as an essential factor contributing to the success of their present segregated I.O.P. configurations. Assigning three teachers to the two classes lowered the student- teacher ratio. Rather than small class size, we would have small group size, thereby reaping the benefits of a small, segregated class setting without the negative stigma of the segregated class.

I saw two classes with three teachers as preferable to one class with two teachers for several reasons. One reason was that if all identified I.O.P. students were in one class, the class would become a segregated class whether that was intended or not. Spreading out learning styles between two classes made for a more natural and educationally sound setting. Students should be able to call upon the varied strengths of their peers as well as their teachers.

On a more practical level, I saw two classes with one extra teacher as being a more efficient allocation of resources. Three teachers would handle two classes for all core subjects. This was preferable to having isolated teachers in self-contained classrooms trying to find enough support staff to accommodate differences. Realistically, there are not enough support staff available to give individual classes enough time to adequately support all students.

I wanted to place students with varied learning styles homogeneously between both classes. The homogeneous grouping strengthened the learning for all and eliminated stigmatization. Teachers planned learning activities that allowed for many learning styles. Of course this is a goal in all classrooms but the reality is that it is very difficult for teachers to do alone. The interdisciplinary teaching team made this task more feasible.

Scheduling had to allow these teachers large blocks of time in which to work. The plan was for the three teachers to deliver each core course to both classes at the same time. This allowed flexible grouping from both classes to interchange between the three teachers. The groupings could be formed for each activity or unit based on learning style. The teachers were not always associated with the same learning style grouping. The groupings changed many times throughout the day but always between the same three teachers.

This was to be a constructivist classroom (Gardner, 1991). Process was valued as much as product. Emphasis was on learning styles when making the groupings. It was important that the students were fully aware of what these styles were all about and how to use their strengths to learn more effectively. All students were doing many different kinds of assignments. There was a great deal of choice available to students, allowing them to demonstrate their understandings in different ways and all these different demonstrations were equally honoured. Acceptance of individual differences and learning styles was taught. Differentiation was the norm, thereby negating the necessity to single out a few students by modifying the one task that all students were expected to do.

It was essential that the teaching team plan very closely together. Each teacher called upon the others' strengths when it came to curriculum and learning styles. Each

teacher had equal responsibility for the learning of the students in both classrooms. It was essential to the success of this enterprise to allow for daily scheduled planning time. I felt that this supportive and supporting team could be very powerful.

Added benefits to this teaching team and block scheduling included the chance for the students in the class and the three teachers to form strong relationships. Often I.O.P. students are at risk. Powerful relationships can be key to reaching these students and turning their school experiences around. In the teaching teams, teachers and students had more time to make meaningful relationships. The fact that there were three teachers ensured that students were able to make at least one connection with their core teachers. Sharing the responsibility of connecting meaningfully with all these students among the teachers helped to make this emotionally draining task less daunting.

I then had the good fortune to become part of the teaching team that I had proposed, although this had not been my intention when I envisioned this setting. I was able to put into practice some of the ideas I had about alternate programming for I.O.P. students. Many of the benefits I had anticipated for all students, but particularly for those at risk, became evident as our team worked together. Students in our class, their parents, and our administrators all were excited about the success we were having together. Students were learning and they were happy. I had anticipated these outcomes and I was pleased, but not overly surprised, by these results.

What I had not expected, and what pleased me the most, were the positive experiences and feelings I had, as well as those feelings and experiences of my team members, about the fabulous teaching experience through which we were going. All of us were having the most fulfilling teaching experiences of our lives, even though it was very

challenging. We had varied backgrounds ranging from kindergarten to high school. Our years of experience ranged from seven years to twenty-two years, and yet we could all say that our experience with interdisciplinary team teaching accounted for the best teaching years of our careers. It was from here that my interest in the benefits to teachers of interdisciplinary team teaching developed. This surprising discovery prompted me to explore the phenomenon of interdisciplinary team teaching and its effect on teacher satisfaction and teacher efficacy.

### Study Setting

The setting of this study, then, is my own grade seven classroom in a rural middle school in Alberta. It is the lived experience of three middle school teachers who shared the responsibility of teaching both regular and special needs students in this classroom. Their stories, their thoughts and their feelings about how the interdisciplinary team teaching experience affected their professional lives are integral to the study. The study took place in the classroom, in the teachers' staff-room, in the hallways and in our living rooms as we constantly de-briefed and marvelled about what we were experiencing. It continued at the conferences as we presented our program to our peers, articulating both for them and for ourselves the effects of interdisciplinary team teaching on our practice. It found its way to the journals and books in the library as I searched and researched this experience, looking for validation of our own experience and for ways to replicate it for others.

## Chapter II

### Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to examine my interdisciplinary team teaching experience and its effect on my own feelings of teacher efficacy, as well as those of my team, in a formal and comprehensive way. The ultimate goal was to identify ways to increase teachers' feelings of efficacy in order to improve instruction for all students and to sustain teacher satisfaction and well-being.

Teaching today is not easy. Teachers and schools are the scapegoat for a wide variety of society's ills. It is becoming increasingly difficult for teachers today to stay motivated in the face of the many attacks on numerous fronts. The teaching profession seems devalued by society. Teachers are constantly asked to do more with less and are becoming stretched to the breaking point. The students themselves and their parents demand a great deal of teachers in terms of expertise, time and energy. Fewer people are entering the field of teaching today, especially men. Teaching as a career is not seen as a desirable profession and teachers are often maligned, criticized and demoralized. It is timely to ask how will teachers already in the teaching profession, as well as those considering entering the field, maintain the positive energy needed to be happy and successful in their jobs? This is a question that must be asked and answered if we are to sustain the fine people who have chosen teaching as a career and to keep our ranks filled with positive, effective instructors.

My team's interdisciplinary team teaching experience had been rich in its rewards and implications for students and in professional growth for us as teachers. I was compelled to examine the role of *interdisciplinary team teaching* and how it had



contributed to the positive feelings of efficacy we, as teachers, experienced. I felt the need to do this mostly because the positive effects that we experienced have been so utterly profound and pleasantly unexpected. All of us have felt a renewed sense of energy and excitement about teaching even though our assignment was more difficult than those to which we were more accustomed. We have all felt that we are better teachers as a result of our interdisciplinary team teaching experience.

I needed to examine this phenomenon and see if this was something other teams had experienced. Interestingly, in the course of my research, I found a study done by Pugach and Wesson (1995) that very closely paralleled my team's experience. The teachers and students interviewed there voiced many of the same feelings and experiences that my team had articulated. Another study by Walter-Thomas and Carter (1993) looked at co-teaching of a special education teacher and general grade eight teachers on a more temporary basis but with similar results. The teachers there found co-teaching professionally satisfying. They found that they were able to learn from each other, help each other and give each other support, all things that our team had identified as being positive aspects of our experience.

I also wondered if these wonderful feelings of teacher efficacy that we felt could be replicated for other teachers thinking about teaming even though I do understand the cautions against making broad generalizations based on case studies. Not unlike a smoker who has recently become a non-smoker, I wanted everyone to be able to have the same kind of terrific experience that my team had.

In the initial year of interdisciplinary team teaching, I felt as if I had gone through a storm of experiences and I needed time to reflect on them and put them into a broader

context. When I introduced the idea of interdisciplinary team teaching and when I joined the team, I felt it was the right thing to do, based on a gut feeling, my readings to date, and my inner beliefs about teaching. The experience has proven to be even more positive than I had imagined. I was not expecting that it would be such a fulfilling experience for me personally and professionally. The feelings I had, and the expressed feelings of my colleagues, took us all by surprise. In fact, we had all anticipated the benefits of team-teaching for the students when we agreed to teach together. We all were a bit hesitant about how it would affect us as teachers, however. One member of my team told me later that she was worried that she would lose her identity as a teacher by becoming a member of a team. We were all wondering how it would work for us. All of us were surprised that we grew so much professionally and personally.

One very valuable purpose for this study, then, is to formally reflect upon an interdisciplinary teaching team's shared experience and its effect on teacher feelings of efficacy. In addition, I hope to connect with the experiences of other teams in an effort to encourage other teachers to see the merits of interdisciplinary team teaching as a way to increase teacher motivation and effectiveness.

### Focus of the Project

The focus of this project is on teachers' feelings of efficacy as a result of engaging in interdisciplinary team teaching. *Teacher Efficacy* shall be taken to mean a sense felt by teachers of their effectiveness and job satisfaction. The National Institute of Education in the U.S. defined *teachers' sense of efficacy* as the extent to which teachers believe that they can affect student learning (Ashton & Webb, 1986). In the Rand study efficacy was defined as "the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance" (McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978). Both Gibson and Dembo (1984) saw efficacy as being separated into two parts, general teaching efficacy and personal efficacy. Teachers with a high sense of general teaching efficacy believe that all students can learn, regardless of their innate ability or outside influencing factors. Teachers with a high sense of personal efficacy believe in their own ability or teaching competence. This case study will primarily focus on the latter, personal efficacy.

This is an important area of study as teacher feelings of efficacy can directly relate to the degree to which students are exposed to quality education. Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy truly believe that all students can learn and that their actions have a direct influence on that process. They then choose challenging and non-limiting practices and are motivated to try different approaches in the attempt to find ones that work best. They are not daunted by failure and keep trying to reach children. They are passionate about teaching and take pride in their accomplishments. High efficacy teachers believe that their students will learn and that they have the ability to teach them (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

The Alberta Document of Quality Education clearly states that being able to meet the needs of all students is an expectation for all teachers in Alberta. Although mandated, these practices cannot be implemented unless teachers believe that they have the skills necessary to achieve them. It is incumbent upon us to be looking for ways to make teachers feel more effective.

Those teachers with a low sense of efficacy believe that there are some students who really cannot learn, either as a result of inadequate innate ability, or because of external circumstances such as a poor home life or low socio-economic status. They also seriously doubt their own ability to instruct children. Distracted by worry that they are not as competent as they could be, these teachers are much more stressed, thus diverting needed time and energy away from instructing children. They expect less from their students and, indeed, get less from them. (Ashton & Webb, 1986).

For the purposes of this study, *interdisciplinary team teaching* shall refer to a team of two or more subject teachers who share the responsibility for the teaching and learning of a group of learners at the same time, and in the same area and who share planning time in order to draw connections between their subjects. It is a way to organize teachers and students into smaller learning communities. Another term often used interchangeably with interdisciplinary team teaching is *collaborative teaching*. This is defined as,

A service delivery structure in which teachers with different knowledge, skills, and talents have joint responsibility for designing, delivering, monitoring, and evaluating instruction for a diverse group of learners in general education classrooms. Both professionals are simultaneously present in the classroom (DeBoer, & Fister, 1995, p. 5).

It is necessary for teaming for teachers to share the same students and to have some common planning time, often facilitated by block scheduling. Teamed teachers need to teach close to each other in order to facilitate communication. The most favourable scenario would be one where the teachers share a common teaching space. The team I was involved in enjoyed this setting and it is the one discussed in this study. Erb (1989) contends that when these elements are in place they have the potential to profoundly affect the work life of teachers and their students. He states,

Yet when teachers take advantage of these four elements, their work life is fundamentally changed, as is the support system for students. Communications patterns within a school change, teachers' involvement in decision making improves, instruction better serves the needs of students, the curriculum is transformed, and teachers find the practice of their profession more rewarding (p. 8),

## CHAPTER III

### Review of the Literature

The study of team teaching as a viable alternative to traditional teaching as a way to increase student outcomes has a long history, dating back to the mid 1950's . Bunyan of Calgary (1965) saw the teacher as the most important factor in team teaching. He saw this initiative as a way to promote better teacher professional development and, therefore, provide a better opportunity for students to learn. He felt that teachers co-operating effectively would need training and preparation in order to effectively deal with the psychological impact of teacher teams. He did not question the benefits of team teaching as he felt they were many and widely accepted. Instead, he warned that we should not undermine its effectiveness with poor teacher training and planning.

Johnson and Hunt (1968) saw team teaching as a way for teachers to come out from under the sometimes-crippling effects of threat upon their practice and free themselves up to become better teachers. They felt that teachers who work in an environment of collaboration, constantly getting new ideas and feedback from others, would become more perceptive and lose the fear that has so often blocked improvement. They saw team teaching as a way for teachers to become more efficient and more effective than their traditional, isolated teaching counterparts. They felt that dignity and integrity were implied in a teaching team and that they were given more freedom to work, not constrained by arbitrary schedules and routines.

Interestingly, Hanslovsky, Moyer and Wagner (1969) observed that relationships are key to team teaching and saw that each group had to establish its own working climate. Their guidelines suggested that freedom for open and honest communication was

essential. They likened the team to family members who must first care about each other as people, and, although this may be threatening to some at first, the resulting improved staff relations were worth the effort.

Edmonds in teaming for teachers (1973) writes that the essential concern of team teaching is that of professional sharing. He contends that team teaching provides a good platform for teachers to engage in professional discourse and to get and give advice about teaching practice without judgment. This, he saw, was a step towards better teacher practice.

Mac Iver (1971) used a national survey conducted by Johns Hopkins University to conclude that interdisciplinary teams, if properly supported, produced many benefits, including improved teacher support and effectiveness of instruction.

In their study of teacher satisfaction with teaching, Chapman and Lowther (1982) discussed the work by Super and Hall (1978) who identified values that should relate to job satisfaction. They found that people who have autonomy over their work, who feel properly rewarded and who are challenged, feel more job satisfaction. Chapman and Lowther contend that many of these attributes are lacking in the teaching profession. They point out that although it is perceived that teachers can run their classrooms as they like, they are in reality controlled by the dictates of curriculum. They discuss how teachers are isolated from others all day while in traditional separate classrooms, thus cut off from opportunities for recognition by others. The repetition of teaching the same material over and over also reduces challenge and job satisfaction. Chapman and Lowther's work corroborated Super and Hall's findings in many areas. They also found that when teachers continue to learn and when they have an opportunity to take on a

leadership role, job satisfaction is more likely. In addition they also found that opportunities for recognition were important factors for job satisfaction, and they saw the school administrator as taking on an important role in staff recognition. I would contend that the isolationism of traditional schools works against teachers being aware of what other teachers are doing, thereby limiting further opportunities for recognition by peers.

Although not writing primarily about team teaching and teacher efficacy, Hargreaves (1972) discussed teacher autonomy and how traditionally intrusions into the privacy of the teacher's classroom were frowned upon. Teacher-to-teacher discussions about what happened behind the closed door of the classroom were few, if present at all. Hargreaves saw a benefit for the then-emerging trend toward team teaching as an opportunity for teachers to talk openly and seriously about their practice.

Rosenholtz (1985) looked at the suggested political solutions to teacher job dissatisfaction and refuted many of their suggestions. Once again, the issue of teacher isolation was identified as one factor that contributed to the repression of professional development and teacher growth. She pointed out that because teachers spend so much time isolated in their classrooms, they have little or no opportunity to observe and learn from others. She then identified any teacher growth as being by "trial and error", an experience of limited value. Teachers avoided seeking advice from others in this type of structure because it was seen as a sign of weakness and others resisted giving advice so as not to insult their colleagues. She also identified competition as an impediment to teacher and school effectiveness. Instead, she identified schools that fostered collaboration as being much more effective and successful. Teachers did not feel the sole responsibility for the success of the learning of their students and help was never far away. Teachers



felt freer to try new things, they became more effective and more enthusiastic. The collective power of the group made them stronger.

Goodlad (1984) called for a more creative way to organize schools and saw interdisciplinary team teaching as a way to solve many of the modern day school dilemmas. His eight year study called for smaller “schools within schools”, more teacher autonomy, more flexible teaching situations and more mastery learning. Boyer (1983) and Sizer (1984) agreed that when teachers worked in teams we could expect significant school reform. Both felt that schools needed to break the barriers between subjects, which can only happen when specialist teachers begin to work together. Working and planning together while using large blocks of time, teachers could gain more control over the learning of the students. Streaming of students would no longer be necessary as flexible groupings could emerge.

Erb (1987) studied the impact of team organization on teachers as he compared schools with teacher teams and more traditionally structured schools. He noted that teamed teachers have more professional discussions, are more involved with the decision-making of the school, and have more influence over decisions that directly affect student learning. Most significantly, however, Erb found that those teachers engaged in teaming found teaching more rewarding and supportive, in part because they experienced a breaking down the isolationism of teaching in traditional class.

Guskey (1987) looked most specifically at the scope of influence variable that affects teacher efficacy, although he acknowledged that it was a multi-faceted phenomenon. He found that teachers felt a greater sense of efficacy when they were successful with a group of students as opposed to individual students.

A small study by Sindelar, Espin, Smith and Harriman (1990) found several factors that contributed to teacher effectiveness. One of those factors was the amount of time spent on student-teacher interaction and the resulting student-teacher rapport. They found that teachers who are more effective find the time to develop relationships with their students. This should be an important consideration when structuring today's schools for today's teachers.

The work by Gatewood, Cline, Green and Harris (1992) looked at teacher stress and compared the amount of stress felt by teamed teachers with the stress of non-teamed teachers. They sent the Teacher Stress Inventory to 300 possible respondents and got a very high return rate (75%). They found that although the difference in the degree of stress between the teamed and non-teamed teachers was negligible, the teamed teachers reported a greater sense of professionalism.

Laven (1992) wrote of how teachers who worked in interdisciplinary teams felt about their jobs. He used the survey instrument *Education in the Middle Grades: A National Survey of Trends and Practices* and distributed it to 200 teachers from 115 middle schools in California. One hundred seven teachers responded and the data indicated that teachers felt strong social support and understanding from their team members.

Husband and Short (1994) conducted a large comparative study of three hundred teachers in schools that were both departmentally organized and organized in interdisciplinary teams. They wanted to examine the relationship between these two program configurations and teachers' feelings of empowerment. They found that teachers

in interdisciplinary team teaching situations felt significantly more empowered. In the area of self-efficacy they found that:

Teachers reported a renewed confidence and satisfaction with their teaching as they were able to provide a more student centered perspective. Teachers felt satisfied and motivated by their work as they saw it as more worthwhile, more their own responsibility, and more the product of their efforts. (p.10-11)

They also found that teachers in interdisciplinary team teaching situations were better able to make decisions that affected their work, acted with greater confidence, were not as prone to professional despair as were isolated teachers, and attained more status and respect for their colleagues, as well as many other benefits. The authors felt that interdisciplinary team teaching was generally a better organizational configuration for both the students and their teachers.

The work by Pounder (1996) discussed team teaching as a way to increase employee involvement and motivation. Teams were designed to increase members' responsibility for the whole group and to create opportunities for self-management. Her comparative study looked at the differences between teamed and non-teamed teachers in relation to job characteristics as suggested by Hackman and Oldham's (1980) "Job Characteristics Model". Her work supports the conclusion that teachers who work in interdisciplinary teams report significantly higher levels of skill variety in their work, as well as increased knowledge of students, job satisfaction, work group effectiveness and efficacy, than do their non-teaming counterparts. Her work was very comprehensive but lacked depth, as she studied only a limited number of teaching teams, all of them in their early stages of development.

A recent work by Davies (1996) found that the effects of team teaching go far beyond the benefits to students. In her study of teachers' narratives in a school engaged in collaborative teaching over time, she noted that the building of trust was a major factor in the building of effective teams. Trust was something that could not be mandated by the school's superiors, but needed to develop over time. She discussed the "outer landscape of schooling" as that which happens outside of the classroom, and saw it as being a vital factor in what happens in the classroom. She reported that if teachers came to the team with a "sense" that they could work well with the other team members it was a prescription for potential success. She supported the view that mandated teaming had limited chance for success and that the fostering and supporting of personal relationships in a team was vital for success. Her work spanned a great deal of time (13 years) but was limited in the number of subjects.

## Chapter IV

### Research Method

#### Ethnology

Lawton (1999) writes about a Special Education teacher, G. Philippsen, who reluctantly agreed to co-teach with math teacher A. Strawn at a high school in Bloomington, Indiana. Although initially sceptical, both teachers found co-teaching so successful, they would not have it any other way. Lawton reported in an interview with Strawn,

There may not be a lot of research into co-teaching's effectiveness, Strawn acknowledges, but he believes that "in every way kids are being helped-and more important, teachers are being helped". He said that's a benefit that doesn't show up on any numerical measures, but you feel it every morning (1999).

I faced this dilemma when I began to think about how I would approach researching my topic of interdisciplinary team teaching and feelings of teacher efficacy. I had to translate into research the great feeling my co-teachers and I had every day when we faced the task of teaching our class together.

I agreed with Patterson (1993), who saw the teacher-researcher as a unique individual. Like other teacher researchers and practitioners, I was constantly trying to understand and make sense of my experiences as an interdisciplinary team teacher in order to continue to make good decisions about my teaching. I was continually engaged in reflection and inquiry so that I could actively improve upon the educational lives of my students and of myself. I was daily bombarded with multiple data sources that guided my everyday action. As Patterson says, "By nature, this process is organic, sometimes messy, unpredictable and generative, just like teachers' lives in and out of school".

For the purposes of this study, I conducted a naturalistic, inquiry-based qualitative case study as defined by Merriam and Yin (1988-89), where the researcher examines a single phenomenon (“the case”) defined by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution or social group) using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 1994).

I am confident that this style of qualitative research best suited my purpose which was to explore teachers’ feelings as they engaged in interdisciplinary team teaching. As a participant observer I was able to gain deep insights by virtue of being so actively involved in the situation being observed. I was a complete participant, being a full member of the team, relegating as secondary my role as observer.

My task as a research analyser of my data was to become comfortable with the emerging patterns and categories I found, as well as to make comparisons and contrasts of my findings with those findings made by others. I attempted to remain flexible and open minded, always looking for alternative explanations for my findings. In keeping with qualitative research protocol, I analysed my data at the same time that I lived it, or collected it from my colleagues, and at the same time that I recorded it. As Creswell (1994) states, “In qualitative analysis, several simultaneous activities engage the attention of the researcher: collecting information from the field, sorting the information into categories, formatting the information into a story or picture, and actually writing the qualitative text.” (p.153).

I engaged in situational analysis in my project. The teaching team was examined from the viewpoint of all three teachers involved. By pulling the three different points of

view of the participants together in order to provide a better understanding of the team teaching experience, I tried to ensure deep understandings.

Naturally, two years of data collection generated a great deal of information. My task was to categorize the data and look for patterns or themes. I then tried to interpret the data based on an emerging plan generated by the data. This is a process Tesch (1990) calls “de-contextualization” and “re-contextualization”, the goal being to create the bigger picture.

## Participants

The participants in this study are three middle school teachers, myself, Sandra Evans, along with Lesley Mercer-Pronchuk and Brooke Colbran. Together we formed the first interdisciplinary team teaching triad to facilitate the implementation of the I.O.P. regional program in the Foothills School Division, Alberta, Canada. We taught a heterogeneous group of 60 grade seven students together for two successive years in a rural middle school in High River, Alberta. We all volunteered to be on the team because we all believed that inclusion was the most appropriate setting for the I.O.P. students and we thought that interdisciplinary team teaching was an interesting way to implement the program. We knew each other as colleagues, having taught on the same staff for one year previously. Lesley and I knew each other a little better, having taught together in another school four years previously. For all of us, our experience with team teaching was limited. We were all excited about the prospect of interdisciplinary team teaching but we were a little nervous as well, not really knowing what to expect.

I came to the team with twenty-two years of teaching experience. Most of that experience had been at the primary level with only three years as a middle school teacher. About half of my experience was with special education, both as a resource teacher<sup>2</sup> and as a learning support teacher. It was through my work as a learning support teacher that I began to believe in the benefits of inclusion for many students. It was also in this role that I had tried to support teachers and integrated students in the regular classroom, with limited and spotty support. I knew that there was frustration on both the teachers' and students' parts with this kind of programming. I joined the team in the role of the

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<sup>2</sup> A resource teacher is a special education specialist who pulls students from their regular classrooms to offer remedial instruction.



“Special Education ‘Expert’”. Although this was initially how we set up our team, the roles became very blurry as we progressed.

Lesley Mercer-Pronchuk came to the team with twelve years of experience. She had trained as a high school teacher but had spent her time in her teaching career as a primary teacher. She had joined the middle school the year before and was a very successful Language Arts and Social Studies teacher. She was our “Humanities ‘Expert’”.

Brooke Colbran was our “Math and Science ‘Expert’”. She had seven years of teaching experience, most of it at the middle school level, although she did teach kindergarten for a time. She taught in a grade seven, eight and nine multi-aged setting in an inner city school in Regina, Saskatchewan and so had some experience with interdisciplinary teaching.

We spent some time together as a team at the start of the year, before the students arrived. We attribute a great deal of the success we had as a team to this time we spent together. During this time, we identified what our core beliefs and values were. We all agreed that developing relationships with children was our most important value. From that we were more easily able to make some of our other decisions. We identified for each other what our learning styles and preferences were. We outlined for each other some issues that upset us as teachers, thereby hoping to avoid them or at least understand them in each other when they arose. We made some agreements or rules that we all agreed to live by, thus setting the foundation for trust, which we believed that we needed in order for this team to be successful. Thus equipped, we tentatively set off into unknown and, for us, uncharted territory, the world of interdisciplinary team teaching.

We believed that this was a good way of teaching children, but we did not know for sure. None of us thought that it would have such a profound effect on how we saw ourselves as teachers, and none of us had anticipated the personal and professional pleasure we would get out of interdisciplinary team teaching. Although it is difficult to separate teacher feelings of efficacy out of all the myriad of experiences we were going through, my data most focuses on this phenomenon.

## Chapter V

### Collected Data

My data is the accumulated teacher comments and observations made during my team's years together. This data is both formal and informal. I collected the data over time as we prepared professional presentations on our teaming experience during the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years. Included also are our stories that reflect our increased feelings of efficacy during our time together. We often spoke of how we each felt that we learned so much from each other. Lesley became a better math teacher. In fact, she was very impressed when one of the students introduced her to their parent as their math teacher. Brooke became a better speller and I learned so much from her about positivism. Together, we truly were greater than the sum of our parts.

I also analysed the content of certain documents developed by the teaching team. This included one of the teacher's journal written in our first year together. The content of the journal reflected many of the stages we went through as a team, at first apprehensive, then gradually more and more excited until, finally, at the end, we had a difficult time imagining teaching in any other way.

The formal collection of the data began in January, 2000. Our team was asked to make a presentation to the Quality 2000 Learning Symposium in Calgary in March of that year. This opportunity forced us to examine our experience with interdisciplinary team teaching in detail in order to articulate it to others. We agreed that over the Christmas break we would each write down our individual thoughts and perceptions about our experience on separate pieces of "post-it" notes. A compilation of all the "post it" notes submissions can be found in Appendix A. After the Christmas break we got

together and stuck each of our “thought notes” on a large science fair cardboard in random order. Ironically, this exercise paralleled the teaching experience we had been going through. In the early months of our experience with interdisciplinary team teaching we had muddled through, not sure what to expect. We were pleased with what was happening in the classroom but we had certainly not had time to analyse the experience, or even hardly discuss it among ourselves. Our experience with interdisciplinary team teaching to that point was just a jumble of experiences, much like the science fair cardboard that stood before us. The next step was to try to place the random thoughts into categories, which we did by moving the post-it notes onto different coloured papers. After that we gave the coloured papers a title that summarized the notes. We then arranged the papers in an order that made sense to us. (See Appendix A)

For the purposes of this study, I then identified the notes that primarily had to do with teachers’ thoughts and feelings on how interdisciplinary team teaching was affecting them personally, as opposed to how it was affecting the students, the school or the parents. I then categorized these thoughts under headings that arose from the data. The headings of “Shared Responsibility”, “Professional Development”, “Fun/Motivation”, and “Empowerment” emerged from the data. Each of the asterisked thought notes was placed under these headings. (See Appendix B for a complete compilation)

## Analysis and discussion of results

An interesting observation about the data collection of the “Sticky notes” is that the data that was collected came about as a result of a request for input with absolutely no agenda. The content of the notes was unknown to the group until we came together. No specific feedback was asked for, just “your thoughts about how interdisciplinary team teaching has gone for you so far”. Teachers were asked to generate “thought notes” about their experience with interdisciplinary team teaching. It was only after we saw the data that we realized so much of it was the same for each of us and how so much of it concerned the positive effect it was having on us as teachers. The program was set up with the expectation that it would be a better setting for students. Indeed, it was perceived to be a better setting for student learning as evidenced in our observations. Of the one hundred and thirty “thought notes” we generated, however, close to sixty of them had to do with teacher feelings of satisfaction. Under this classification I included such comments as

If someone is having a problem with a part or a student we can share observations, share responsibility and sit back and watch and learn

Able to learn personally and professionally by working with each other “There’s no learning like peer learning.”

Different yet complementary strengths

4 heads are better than one. All have different strengths and abilities

Can bounce things off each other first before we act.

Professionally- working with other teachers- seeing how and why they handle situations and students- another perspective

Re-think philosophies, May not always agree but have many opportunities to reflect on practices which are routine

Teachers are more flexible and realistic in their thinking.

Teachers on a team come to realize that they are not responsible for only one subject area anymore. They teach the whole child

(See appendix A, “thought notes” with an asterisk). This came a surprise to me as a participant observer. I had not anticipated that interdisciplinary team teaching would have had such a profound effect on teacher feelings of work satisfaction.

I then looked at the “thought notes” that pertained to teachers’ feelings of satisfaction with interdisciplinary team teaching. After grouping the notes into categories, the headings of “Shared Responsibility”, “Professional Development”, “Fun/Motivation”, and “Empowerment” evolved. It did not come as a surprise to me that these headings arose from the data, as they are consistent with the findings of other researchers in the field.

I was struck by the number of observations that came under the heading of Shared Responsibility. Under this heading I included such statements as

One person is readying the video while another is prepping the kids for the video while another is collecting for students who are away\*

While one is teaching, others can watch attention span/ level of concentration/ work habits

Focus more on teaching/ learning.

Managing all the little tasks that make a classroom run smoothly are dealt with. No back of the mind “What do I need to do?”

Taking the loneliness/isolation out of teaching. Constant support

Evaluation is easier with three pairs of eyes. It’s not evaluate or instruct, both can occur in our classroom simultaneously

Truly amazing the number of ideas we have brainstormed and tried out together that never would have happened had we been working on our own.\*

Classroom interruptions don’t interrupt the flow e.g. Bathroom/drink/ I don’t have my book

Get support quickly

We remind each other of details, eg. Meetings

Parent notification is shared. Communication between home and school is improved

Sometimes kids don’t get what they need and a single teacher may not have it to give.

Can call on other adults to give them what they need

Phone calls mid class don’t interrupt lessons

We can build relationships with our parents. They feel in tune with what is going on.

How many times have we been thanked?

Somebody is covering your back- reduces stress

Others observe- see things I would have missed

Stress level decreased for us – not alone  
 Kids aren't really subjected to a mood as we can relieve each other  
 Clean up from Sub day is not a big deal.\*  
 Reduces stress. Ideas are shared, for example the science trip  
 More than once I've heard, "Thanks for dealing with that, I didn't want to come on too strong/too mild"  
 It's nice to be able to write "I assist" in my plan book

This heading, I believe, targets some of the major issues in teacher job satisfaction today.

When responsibility is shared, stress is reduced. One is not alone and isolated, shouldering the sole responsibility for the successful learning of all the students. Teachers in an interdisciplinary team-teaching situation have ample opportunity for support, validation, celebration and companionship, all of which help to alleviate stress.

I was also not surprised that a great deal of data could be arranged under the heading of "Empowerment". This heading included such statements as

Can differentiate rather than modify  
 Time to develop relationships because we have them all day  
 Equal importance of ideas. Teacher-educational Assistant  
 Expertise distinctions are melting Lesley is seen as a math teacher.\*  
 Interacting more with students\*  
 Able to develop relationships with students  
 Comfort level is increasing-getting to know kids well\*  
 High level of intimacy in our room – kids are sharing things that are painful with the whole group.- can trust us all.  
 Behaviour is better  
 Teaching in a single class by myself, it is evident how important team teaching can benefit students. I feel I am not reaching all students- lack of relationships- students who have difficulties, it is tough  
 Teachers feel more connected to the kids- responsibility and caring- All homeroom kids- can see moods/changes

I believe that feelings of lack of control add to feelings of stress for everyone, not just teachers. The more influence one has over one's life and surroundings, the less anxious one should be. At one point I wanted to call this heading, "Able To Do What You Always Wanted To Do". Many of the notes indicate a delight in being able to do the

things that all good teachers want to do, but often do not have the opportunity to do them, which can result in a great deal of frustration. Interdisciplinary team-teaching seemed to allow us to finally do these things, thus reducing our levels of frustration and the stress.

Certainly it is important to discuss teacher stress and job dissatisfaction now, for it was in these areas that interdisciplinary team teaching had the greatest impact on us as teachers. Throughout the course of the two years that my team and I worked together, each one of us in turn faced some very serious personal stressors. One of us went through a separation and preparation for divorce while the other two lost a loved one to cancer. Each one of us felt that these personal crises were made more manageable due to the support of the team at school. The other team members were able to carry the load for the teacher in crisis until she was able to get back on track. I believe that recovery time was quickened because of the support of the team. I believe this says a great deal about the positive affects of interdisciplinary team teaching. Even though we all experienced exceptional personal life stress as well as the added stress of starting a new program with students who are an extra challenge, we all felt less stressed as we worked together. Lesley wrote in her journal on June 13, 2000, "Stress, stress, stress! Boy- this is a drag!! However, it does seem more manageable given that the four of us share the load." (the fourth person was our learning assistant).

Teacher job dissatisfaction is not new. Sergiovanni (1966) looked at teacher satisfaction and dissatisfaction in an effort to isolate factors that satisfy or dissatisfy teachers. He concluded at that time that teachers found satisfaction in the work itself, citing achievement, recognition and responsibility as contributing to job satisfaction.



Difficulties with interpersonal relations, school policy, status and unfairness were factors that contributed to teacher dissatisfaction.

Interestingly, work done by Carter (1994) the Western Regional Resource Centre asked what schools might do to help alleviate teacher stress. The following is taken from her findings.

When asked what schools might do to help relieve teacher stress, the most frequently mentioned strategies (in ranked order of importance) were:

- Allowing time for teachers to collaborate/talk,
- Providing more workshop/in-services/advanced courses,
- Providing more verbal praise/reinforcement/respect for the job
- Providing more support,
- Providing more paraprofessionals/support staff/clerical assistance,
- Providing more educational opportunities to learn about students with behavioural disorders and program options.
- Building better communication and decision-making involvement with administrators. (1994).

The first and most important suggestion to reduce teacher stress is addressed by interdisciplinary team-teaching. It is not surprising, then, that the teachers in this case study found they were much less stressed as teachers when they became part of an interdisciplinary team. The opportunity to collaborate has had a huge influence on our professional lives.

Cedoline also addresses this issue in his work, Job Burnout in Public Education (1982). He confirms that social support is the single most effective way to remediate against teacher distress. A great deal of research cites social support as a way to relieve stress. Cedoline observes that:

Organizations can assist by supporting either informal or formal programs among employees. Distress rates are lower for individuals who actively express feelings

to colleagues. Surprisingly, what individuals may have felt to be their singular concern is shared by others. Mutual expression of feelings and ideas about similar concerns can serve as a yardstick for comparison. Sharing also provides valuable information on others' reactions to stressful situations. Most importantly, it provides positive feedback often lacking within the organizational structure (p.115).

The thought notes under the headings of "Professional Development" and "Fun/Motivation" can also be seen as ways to alleviate teacher stress. Some of our examples include:

Mary- You guys have so much fun together! It is great.\*  
 Lots of humour, fun and play which is difficult with only one adult per room  
 Have fun\*  
 We motivate each other to be healthy, both physically and mentally  
 Energy to keep going.\*  
 Energy from each other  
 Supportive of a healthy lifestyle- looking after ourselves and each other. Support!

There is no doubt that humour is a great stress reducer. It is difficult to say whether teachers can have more fun when engaged in interdisciplinary team-teaching and, therefore, stress is reduced, or that stress is reduced due to other aspects of interdisciplinary team teaching and, therefore, teachers are able to have more fun. Either way, the results are the same. Teachers having more fun make for healthier, more effective teachers, which in turn benefits students.

The thoughts under the heading "Professional Development" indicate an excitement about renewed learning from colleagues. Once again, Lesley's journal (January 4, 2001) echoes the thought notes,

It was thrilling to have one's belief system affirmed and to feel the loneliness of the teaching profession slip away.  
 Here – I feel a connectedness to my colleagues, that is so comfortable and non-threatening. As I know I have their support I feel more willing to reach a little further and attempt a little more. To draw on the energy of the other educators in the middle of a thought while teaching is so powerful and real."

I, too, had felt the power of the team that allowed me to take risks and try things I never would have tried on my own. I had never taught grade seven before I engaged in the team and I know that I would not have taken on the assignment had I been on my own. We all taught single classes on our own as well as our interdisciplinary team teaching assignment. We all agreed that we did not feel as effective as teachers in these more traditional classes. We found ourselves seeking input from our team members regarding these classes, too. I personally looked forward to my teamed classes much more than my non-teamed classes.

I understand that a great deal of this reduced stress must be attributed to the fact that we felt that we had worked hard at becoming a very successful team. I would caution that the same results we experienced would not be possible in a team that was not functioning successfully. In fact, I believe a poor working team could add to teacher stress.

## Chapter VI

### Significance and Implications of the Work

The greatest value of this work for me has been the personal journey I took as I recounted and reflected upon my experience as a member of an interdisciplinary teaching team. It has helped me to become a true reflective practitioner and has made my experience in interdisciplinary team teaching more fulfilling. This work has helped me to better articulate the feelings and emotions I experienced as a member of my team and its impact on me as a professional. It is especially fitting that I write this work just as my team is about to disperse. It has helped me to bring closure to a very important and meaningful stage in my career. It has also helped me to closely evaluate the strengths of the interdisciplinary team-teaching approach as I endeavour to form a new team in the expectation that I will enjoy the same benefits. We have all said that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to go back to teaching in an isolated traditional classroom.

I am becoming more and more convinced that interdisciplinary team-teaching is a powerful way for teachers to sustain enthusiasm for their profession and remain effective teachers for their students. The more we can take down walls, either physical or psychological, and encourage each other to work together, the better our profession and professional lives will be. We must actively pursue ways to support our teachers at a time when teaching is seen as increasingly unrewarding. The toll job stress is taking on teacher health and satisfaction is a price too high to pay. Research leaves us no doubt that collaboration is an effective way to promote teacher well being. Anything we can do as members of a profession to promote increased collaboration needs to be actively pursued.

The very act of putting teachers into interdisciplinary teaching teams will not necessarily make them more effective, thereby reaping the benefits of increased teacher efficacy. It is my belief, in fact, that poorly constructed teams could have the opposite effect by adding to teacher stress and job dissatisfaction. Careful steps and considerations need to be made in order for these teams to be successful. Erb and Doda have written a very comprehensive monograph outlining many of these steps. (Erb, & Doda, 1989)

Upon reflection, my team implemented many of their suggestions, however unwittingly. The team member selection process looked after itself as we all chose to be on the team, believing that it was a good thing to do, even though we were each a little nervous about trying something so new to us. We each took responsibility and leadership for one part of the team. Leadership in different areas developed naturally and stemmed from our different strengths. We took time to reflect on our own and each other's learning and teaching styles to help us understand each other better. We gave ourselves a series of learning inventories and then discussed the results. One of us came out very strongly as a task orientated learner, while another was more of a big idea person. Another was very good at attending to details. Although each one of us had a different style, we all held the same core beliefs, standards, and expectations.

We set goals and rules for ourselves and lived carefully within those parameters. We promised each other that we would only say that we would do something if we really knew that we would, in fact, do it. In other words, we agreed to never let each other down. We promised each other that we would keep team planning time as sacred and that we would not let anything interfere with it. All that being said, we also agreed that our families came first. We all had children at home and we agreed not to apologise when we

needed to take care of things on the home front. We openly discussed what we needed from each other before the students set foot in the classroom. We told each other what “bugged” us. For example, one of us did not like the classroom too messy. Another did not want anyone going into her desk and arranging things and tidying it up. We worked out all the little things that might bother us before they really did. Through the trust we carefully had developed, we were able to work effectively with each other, overcoming the bumps that are inevitable in any group situation. We were able to speak openly and honestly with each other when minor conflicts arose. We had realistically anticipated these times and had already agreed to tackle them openly and honestly. We had had so many good times and experiences together that when conflict did arise, we all looked for ways to resolve it to everyone’s satisfaction. We looked at all our experiences, both with the students and with ourselves, as problem solving opportunities. This frame of mind helped us to resolve all differences quickly and amicably.

We took time to evaluate what we were doing, both as instructors and as team members. The time we took to reflect on our practice in order to prepare for the presentations we were making proved to strengthen our team. Any benefits attributed to interdisciplinary team-teaching should be qualified by the assumption that the team is an effective one. Effective teams do not just emerge; they need to be nurtured, much like a marriage.

Another caution that needs to be considered when reflecting on our team’s feelings of increased efficacy comes from Guskey (1988). In his study, Guskey looked at effective teachers and their tendencies to gravitate to new teaching practices. He found that they are more receptive to innovative teaching practices than are those who see

themselves as less effective. He asserted that this can be used as a caution when evaluating new programs that are implemented by volunteers, as they may already be effective, thereby affecting the success of the new program. This, then, is something for our team to reflect on. Were we already effective teachers, more open to trying interdisciplinary team teaching and so, naturally, the experience made us feel effective? I would say no. Although each one of us felt high degrees of success with our teaching before we became part of an interdisciplinary team teaching team, we found that the experience made us feel even more effective.

These cautions aside, interdisciplinary team teaching needs to be considered as a powerful strategy designed to help increase feelings of teacher efficacy, a benefit to both teachers and students. Certainly, the most compelling reason for developing high efficacy teachers is because they have a strong impact on the learning of their students. Both Armor (1976) and Berman and McLaughlin (1977) identified teacher efficacy as the most important factor affecting student learning and teaching, even the most unteachable.

This work adds to the growing body of research that suggests that interdisciplinary team teaching is a powerful teaching tool, a way to engage teachers more fully in the art of teaching as well as a way to significantly improve schools and schooling. Arthar and Markle (1988) were clear in their support for teaming as they stated, "It is clear that team arrangements reduce teacher isolation, increase satisfaction, and improve individual teachers' sense of efficacy." Collaboration has long been a more accepted practice in the elementary schools. Its implications for teachers and student

learning make one hope that the benefits will also find their way into junior high schools, high schools and beyond.

I would hope that others who read my work would want to take the journey into interdisciplinary team-teaching themselves. The interest in this type of approach is there, as evidenced by the invitations our team has had to speak of our experience at various conferences. The response to our presentations at these conferences has been most favourable. We have had many requests to share our experience with other teachers at other conferences as a result of hearing what we are doing. We have had visitors to the class and we have visited other schools thinking of restructuring. Superintendents from out of province wanted to bring teachers to our class to explore what we were doing with the possibility of trying it themselves. Many professionals, although a little intimidated by the cost or the size of the classroom, can see that there are benefits to be reaped. This project has added credibility to our presentations and has helped our team to better understand our own experience in order to better articulate it to others.



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Appendix A  
Compilation of "Post-it" Notes Data

Why it got started

|   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|
| Special class VS segregated class             | Safe and Caring Schools                                      | Middle School is supposed to be "teaming" | Needed because of wide disparity of student needs |
| Not a "special ed." class, works for everyone | Huge levels of abilities-force us to examine learning styles | Can differentiate rather than modify*     |   |

Beliefs

|  |   |  |   |
|--|---|--|---|
| Time to develop relationships because we have them all day*                    | Number one goal is the success/happiness of the students          | Shared philosophy  | Kids hang out with us at lunch                              |
| Learning styles honoured   | We all believe in cooperative learning. We are willing to let go. | Understanding and accommodating others' teaching styles- willing to be flexible* | Equal importance of ideas<br>Teacher-educational Assistant* |
| Planning active lessons-especially for I.O.P.                                  | Humour!*  | Humour<br>New Outfits*   | Mary- You guys have so much fun together! It is great.*     |
| Lots of humour, fun and play which is difficult with only one adult per room.* |   |  |   |

What we do and what it looks like

|  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| Changes depending on activity          | Can be a lead, coach, scribe, housekeeper                         | Purposeful acknowledgement of learning styles | Teach students about their multiple intelligence strengths             |
| Multiple intelligence and study skills | 4 adults allows for multi-purpose groups, interests and abilities | Different hats                                | Opportunities for individual students to do non-traditional activities |

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| Cooperative learning group work is enhanced- there is an opportunity for students to have a quiet place                                   | Cooperative learning   | We divide into groups instinctively for many reasons                   | One adult can pull a students or groups of students to work on a specific concept or to catch up on missed work |
| Commercial breaks   | Have fun*  | We think about addressing everyone's needs, not just the O.P. students | Math learning styles, e.g. TLE or baking  |
| If someone is having a problem with a part or a student we can share observations, share responsibility and sit back and watch and learn* | One person is readying the video while another is prepping the kids for the video while another is collecting for students who are away* | Balance of activity and pencil/paper                                   | Expertise distinctions are melting Lesley is seen as a math teacher.*   |

#### How it affects learning

|                                 |  |   |   |
|---------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Interacting more with students* | Able to develop relationships with students*   | Comfort level is increasing-getting to know kids well*  | High level of intimacy in our room – kids are sharing things that are painful with the whole group.- can trust us all.*   |
| Behaviour is better             | While one is teaching, others can watch attention span/ level of concentration/ work habits* | Having a paraprofessional in the room is vital- another teacher to quickly meet student needs | Focus more on teaching/ learning. Managing all the little tasks that make a classroom run smoothly are dealt with. No back of the mind "What do I need to do?"* |

|   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| Most students want to go on field trips. High interest. | Commitment to teaming and innovative risk-taking teaching |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|

### Benefits

|   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| Able to learn personally and professionally by working with each other<br>“There’s no learning like peer learning.”*                          | Different strengths-<br>Examples of recognizing each others’ strengths-<br>*                      | Taking the loneliness/isolation out of teaching.<br>Constant support*                   | Empowerment*   |
| Truly amazing the number of ideas we have brainstormed and tried out together that never would have happened had we been working on our own.* | Classroom interruptions don’t interrupt the flow<br>i.e.<br>Bathroom/drink/ I don’t have my book. | Idea of team building is not only a factor/ expectation but it is modelled for the kids | Modelling teamwork   |
| We motivate each other to be healthy, both physically and mentally.*  | Energy to keep going.*  | Energy from each other.*  | Get support quickly.*  |
| Behaviour issues are dealt with as they happen – no student is left waiting. Very few behaviour problems with the class                       | Can follow up phone calls ASAP.   | Follow through is better  | Kids don’t slip through the day without one of us recognizing a student who is in need, especially our students who are at risk. |
| We remind each other of details, i.e. Meetings*   | Parent notification is shared.<br>Communication between home and school is improved.              | Sometimes kids don’t get what they need and a single teacher may not have it to give.   |  |

|  |  |   |   |
|--|--|---|---|
|  |  | Can call on other adults to give them what they need.*  | Teaching in a single class by myself, it is evident how important team teaching can benefit students. I feel I am not reaching all students- lack of relationships- students who have difficulties, it is tough.* |
| Phone calls mid class don't interrupt lessons*   | Beneficial for parents/ lowers anxiety. Easier to get a hold of. | We can build relationships with our parents. They feel in tune with what is going on. How many times have we been thanked?* | We know what the kids did in periods 1,2,3 etc. Therefore we can balance their day.   |
| Teachers know when other teachers are giving tests, exams so they can keep the other homework load light | Somebody is covering your back- reduces stress*                  | Can teach kids, not subjects.   | How many students were talked about before 9:00 o'clock. We are able to arrange support for students in need.   |

#### Why it is working for us and students

|   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
| Right team members is key.  | Different yet complimentary strengths.*         | 4 heads are better than one. All have different strengths and abilities.*  | Can bounce things off each other first before we act.*          |
| Professionally-working with other teachers- seeing how and why they handle situations and students- another perspective.* | Others observe- see things I would have missed* | Teachers on a team come to realize that they are not responsible for only one subject area anymore. They teach the whole child.* | Open and honest communication to develop a high level of trust. |



|  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| All teachers know what is happening in each subject.- they are present for all subjects even if they teach only one core subject | Teaching connections- less throw away knowledge.  | Re-think philosophies, May not always agree but have many opportunities to reflect on practices which are routine.* | Support from administration.   |
| Kids aren't really subjected to a mood as we can relieve each other.*  | Teachers are more flexible and realistic in their thinking.*  | Clean up from Sub day is not a big deal.*   | Supportive of a healthy lifestyle- looking after ourselves and each other. Support!*   |
| Reduces stress. Ideas are shared, for example the science trip.*   | Meetings before to understand general teaching expectations. Must be willing to do this. Cannot be administrative driven. | Balance of personalities, Combinations of strengths and weaknesses.*  | Flow of lessons is improved  |
| Stress level decreased for us – not alone.*  | More than once I've heard, "Thanks for dealing with that, I didn't want to come on too strong/too mild"*                  | It's nice to be able to write "I assist" in my plan book*   | Evaluation is easier with three pairs of eyes. It's not evaluate or instruct, both can occur in our classroom simultaneously.* |
| More control over scheduling, make time work for us, more learning time*   | Scheduling is everything!   | Fewer transitional times. Class more settled.   | Homework checks and completion are followed up immediately, that way we can see who is and who is not having difficulties.     |
| Behaviour can be dealt with quickly.   | Kids telling kids, "Your going to have to do this eventually- just do it.   | Constant communication about kids, events, reminders*   | Room for the unexpected- fun, Einstein mascot.*  |
| Kids say they don't get away with much- if one doesn't see it , another one will.  | Kids have so many choices   | Kids are getting work done. At risk kids working harder to keep up- has lots of help to do this.                    | Quieter classroom  |

|  |                                 |  |   |
|--|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Less stigma attached to groups "the Bluebirds" | Very open and caring classroom. | Emotional teaching moments- spur of the moment meetings* | All three teachers really know the students and can recognize the student's need (timing is crucial)* |
|--|---------------------------------|--|---|

#### Evidence of Success

|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| Each kid has a close relationship with at least on adult in the room and other important relationships.        | Teachers feel more connected to the kids- responsibility and caring- All homeroom kids- can see moods/changes* | Meaningful learning- not throw away as connections are made between subjects.  | Time management   |
| Students have a sense of belonging, ownership, and pride as to what is happening in the classroom.             | Kids caring for kids   | Kids seeing other kids as having problem they do not feel so isolated.   | Sharing, risk takers.   |
| Self esteem and risk taking. A lot of students are willing to take risks (self esteem and self image improved) | Paraprofessionals want to work in our classroom.*  | Kids from other classrooms are hearing about what is going on. They tend to hang out in our classroom asking what is going on. | Academic achievement. Kids are seeing themselves as learners. |

Appendix B  
Data Organization Under Appropriate Headings

| Shared Responsibility  | Professional Development   | Fun/Motivation   | Empowerment   |
|--|--|--|---|
| One person is readying the video while another is prepping the kids for the video while another is collecting for students who are away*                       | If someone is having a problem with a part or a student we can share observations, share responsibility and sit back and watch and learn | Humour!*   | Can differentiate rather than modify                                  |
| While one is teaching, others can watch attention span/ level of concentration/ work habits  | Able to learn personally and professionally by working with each other "There's no learning like peer learning."                         | Humour<br>New Outfits*   | Time to develop relationships because we have them all day            |
| Focus more on teaching/ learning. Managing all the little tasks that make a classroom run smoothly are dealt with. No back of the mind "What do I need to do?" | Different yet complimentary strengths  | Mary- You guys have so much fun together! It is great.*                      | Equal importance of ideas<br>Teacher-educational Assistant            |
| Taking the loneliness/isolation out of teaching. Constant support  | 4 heads are better than one. All have different strengths and abilities  | Lots of humour, fun and play which is difficult with only one adult per room | Expertise distinctions are melting Lesley is seen as a math teacher.* |
| Evaluation is easier with three pairs of eyes. It's not evaluate or instruct, both can occur in our classroom simultaneously                                   | Can bounce things off each other first before we act.  | Have fun*  | Interacting more with students*                                       |
|  |  |  |   |

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| Truly amazing the number of ideas we have brainstormed and tried out together that never would have happened had we been working on our own.* | Professionally-working with other teachers- seeing how and why they handle situations and students- another perspective         | We motivate each other to be healthy, both physically and mentally                  | Able to develop relationships with students   |
| Classroom interruptions don't interrupt the flow<br>i.e.<br>Bathroom/drink/ I don't have my book  | Re-think philosophies, May not always agree but have many opportunities to reflect on practices which are routine               | Energy to keep going.*  | Comfort level is increasing-getting to know kids well*  |
| Get support quickly   | Teachers are more flexible and realistic in their thinking.   | Energy from each other  | High level of intimacy in our room – kids are sharing things that are painful with the whole group.- can trust us all.  |
| We remind each other of details, i.e. Meetings  |   | Supportive of a healthy lifestyle- looking after ourselves and each other. Support! | Behaviour is better   |
| Parent notification is shared.<br>Communication between home and school is improved   | Teachers on a team come to realize that they are not responsible for only one subject area anymore. They teach the whole child. |   | Teaching in a single class by myself, it is evident how important team teaching can benefit students. I feel I am not reaching all students- lack of relationships- students who have difficulties, it is tough |
|   |   |   | Empowerment   |

|  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
| Sometimes kids don't get what they need and a single teacher may not have it to give. Can call on other adults to give them what they need |  |  |   |
| Phone calls mid class don't interrupt lessons  |  |  | Teachers feel more connected to the kids- responsibility and caring- All homeroom kids- can see moods/changes |
| We can build relationships with our parents. They feel in tune with what is going on. How many times have we been thanked?                 |  |  |   |
| Somebody is covering your back- reduces stress   |  |  |   |
| Others observe- see things I would have missed   |  |  |   |
| Stress level decreased for us – not alone  |  |  |   |
| Kids aren't really subjected to a mood as we can relieve each other  |  |  |   |
| Clean up from Sub day is not a big deal.*  |  |  |   |
| Reduces stress. Ideas are shared, for example the science trip   |  |  |   |
|  |  |  |   |


|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| More than once<br>I've heard,<br>"Thanks for<br>dealing with that, I<br>didn't want to<br>come on too<br>strong/too mild" |  |  |  |
| It's nice to be able<br>to write "I assist"<br>in my plan book  |  |  |  |

Appendix C  
PowerPoint Presentation

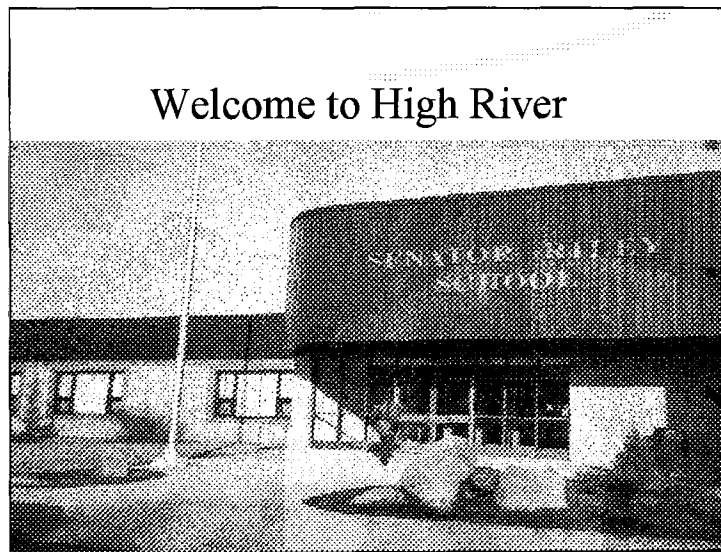
Slide 1

Building Bridges With  
Teamwork

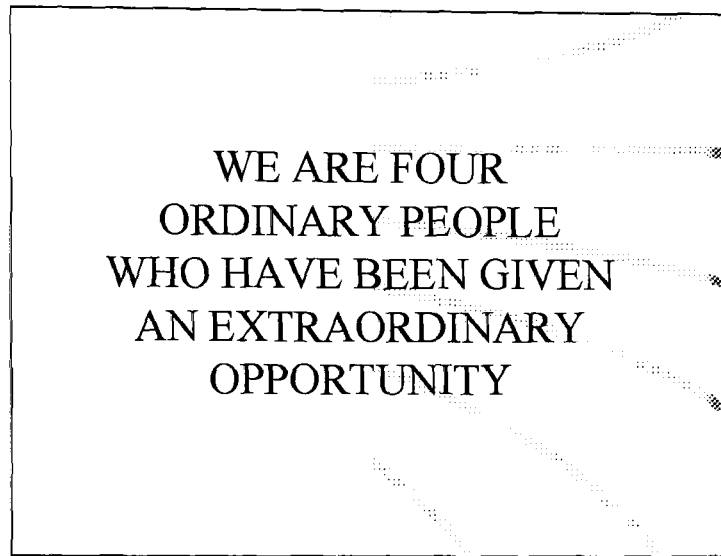
- Brooke Colbran
- Sandy Evans
- Lesley Mercer-Pronchuk
- Irene Leavitt



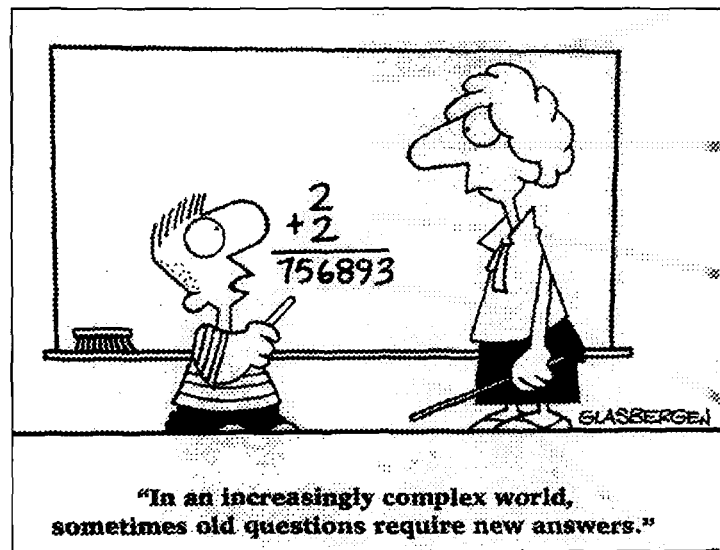
Slide 2



Slide 3



Slide 5





## Slide 6

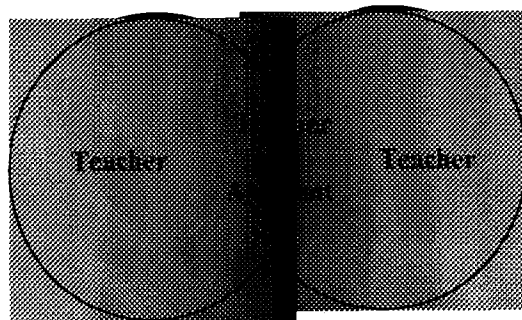
The magnitude of the task before  
us, and our beliefs about  
teaching and learning led us to  
conclude that

**TEAM TEACHING**

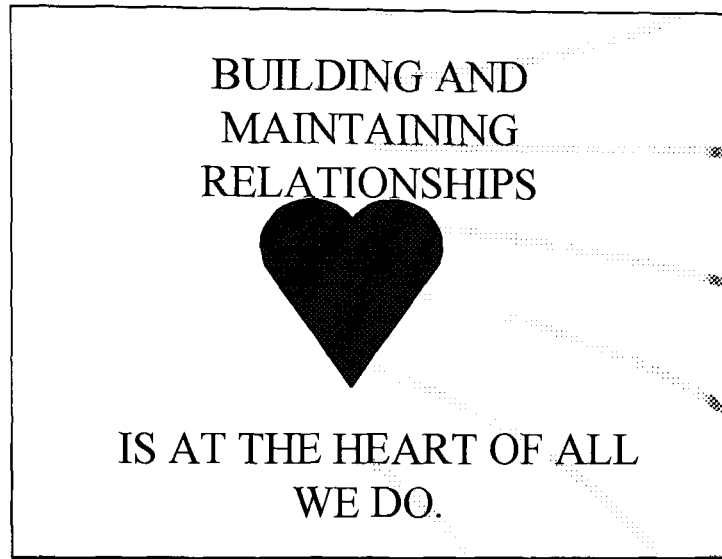
was the best way to meet the  
needs of all learners in our class.

## Slide 7

**OUR BRIDGES  
CLASSROOM**



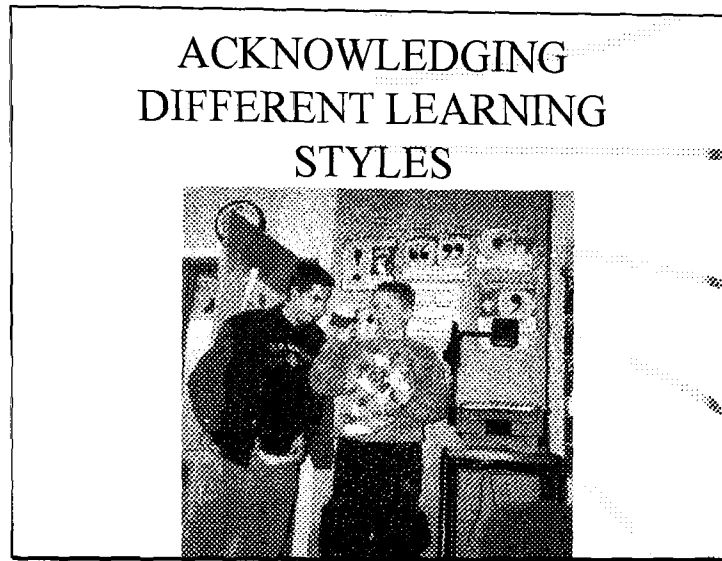
Slide 8



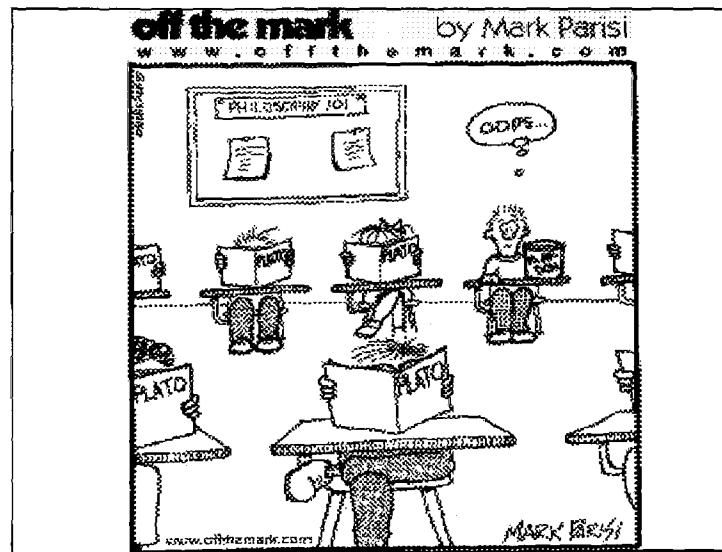
Slide 9



Slide 10



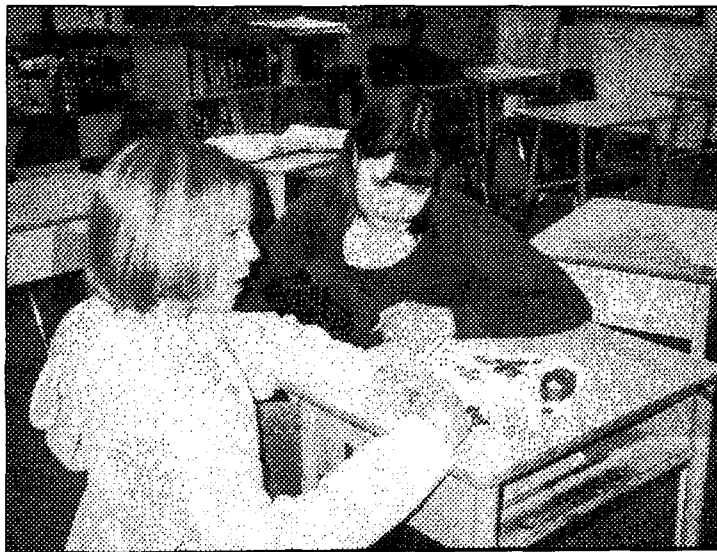
Slide 11



Slide 12



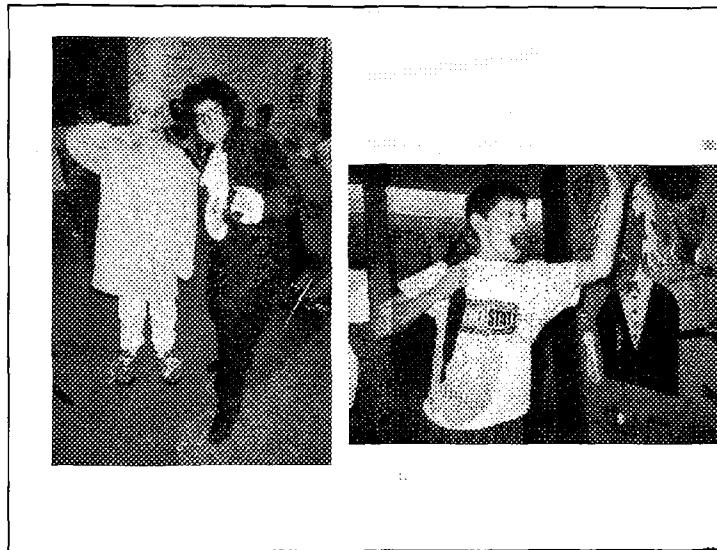
Slide 13



Slide 14



Slide 16



Slide 17

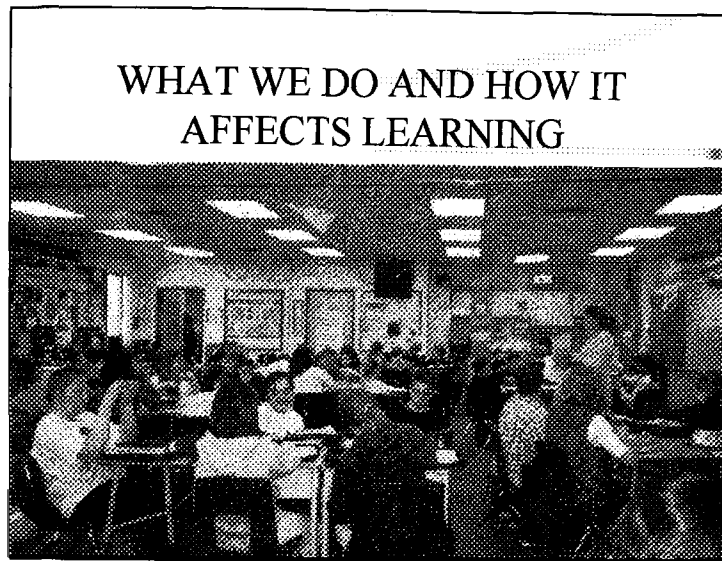


Slide 18

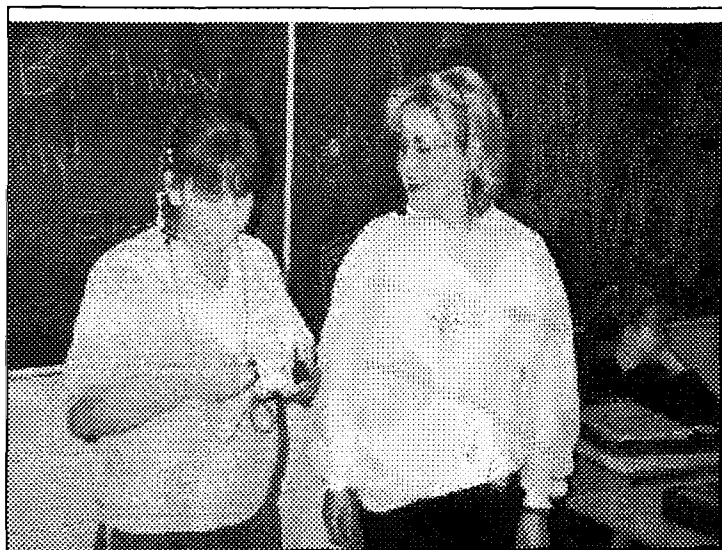
Mary "You guys have so much fun together. It's great!"



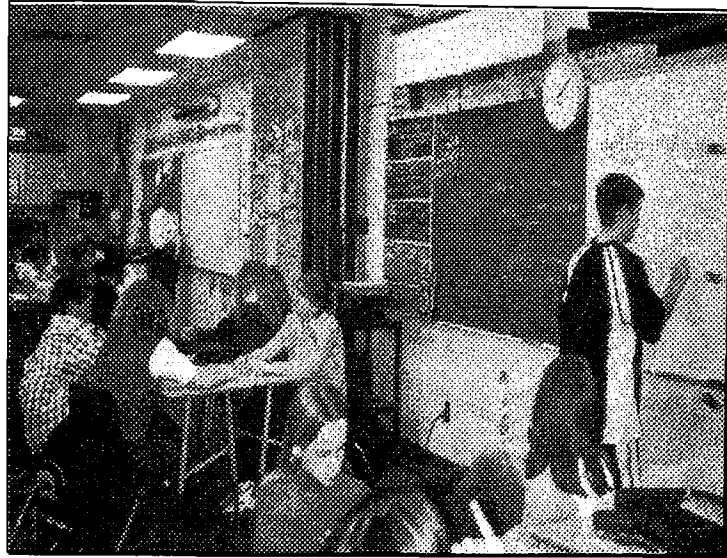
Slide 19



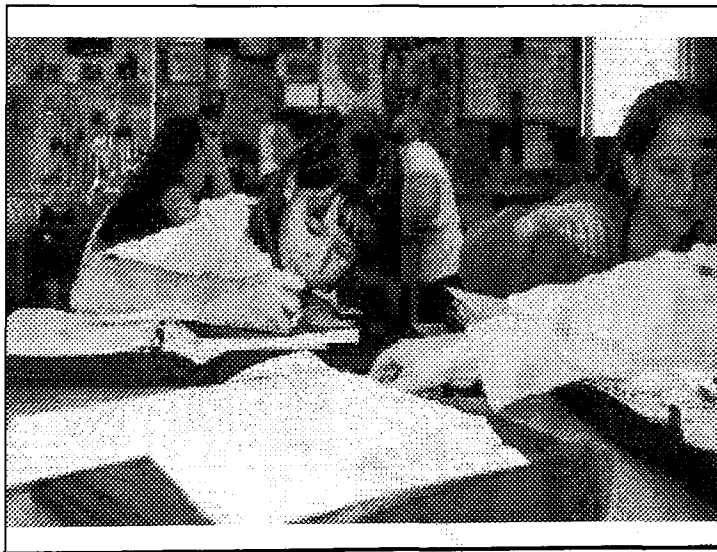
Slide 20



Slide 21

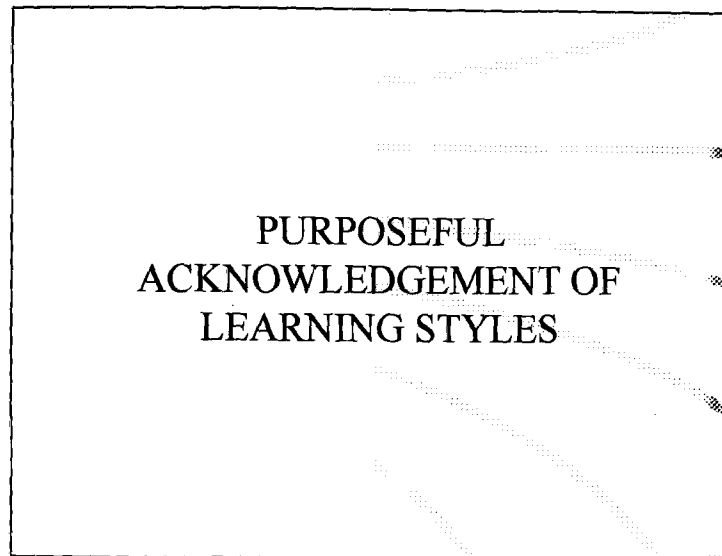


Slide 22

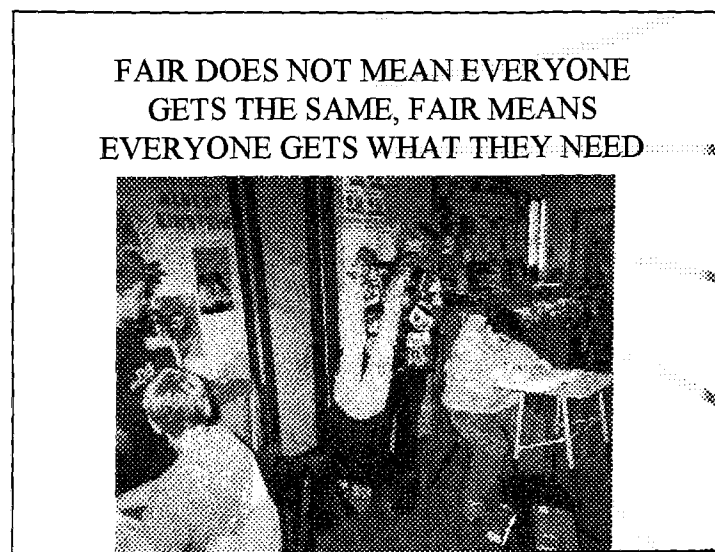




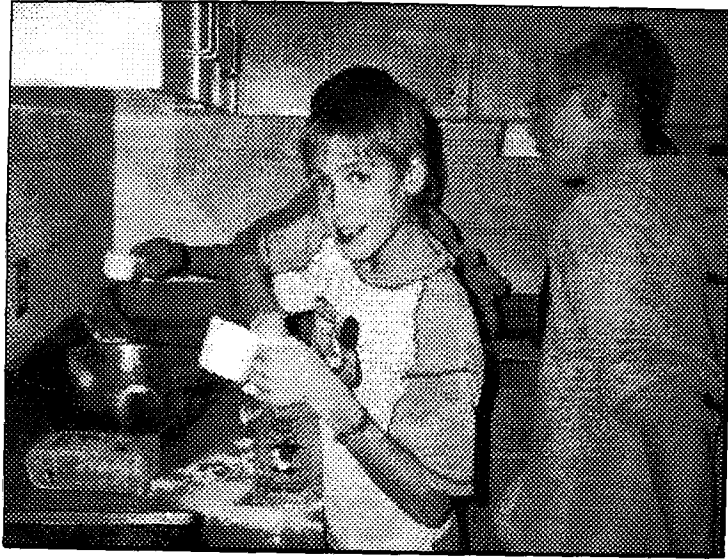
Slide 23



Slide 24



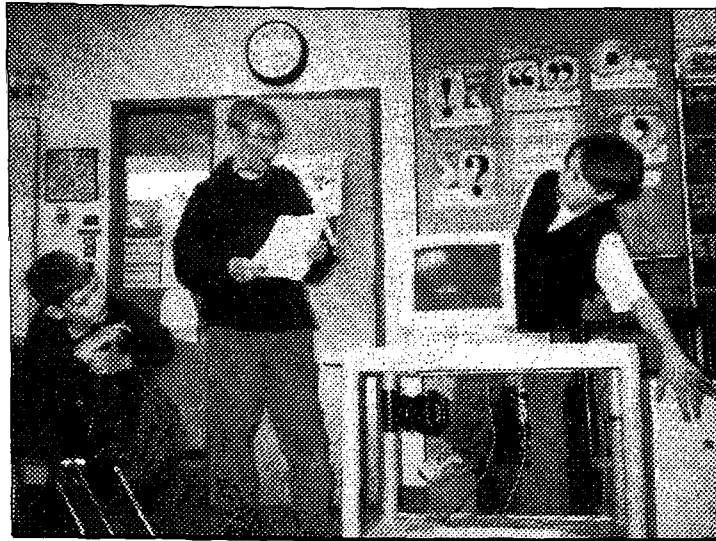
Slide 25



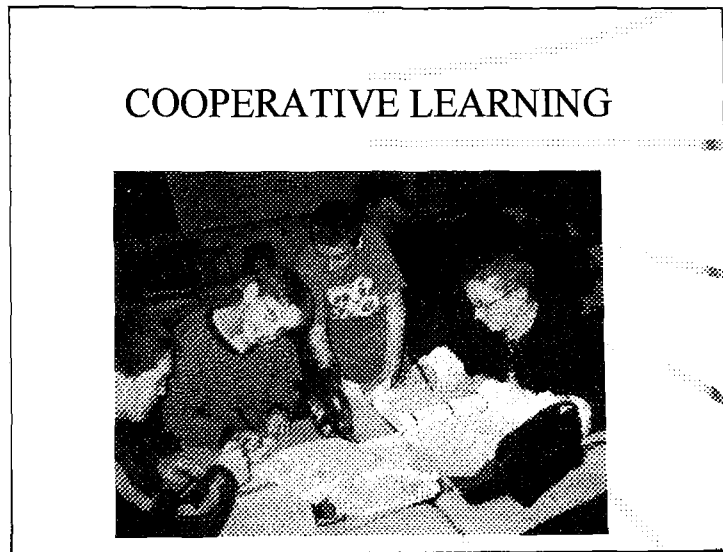
Slide 26

KIDS LEARNING ABOUT  
THEIR OWN LEARNING  
STYLE AND MULTIPLE  
INTELLIGENCE STRENGTH

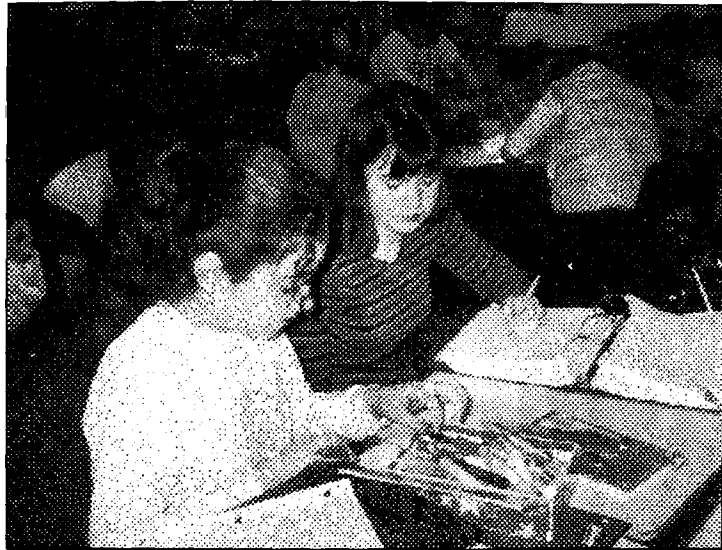
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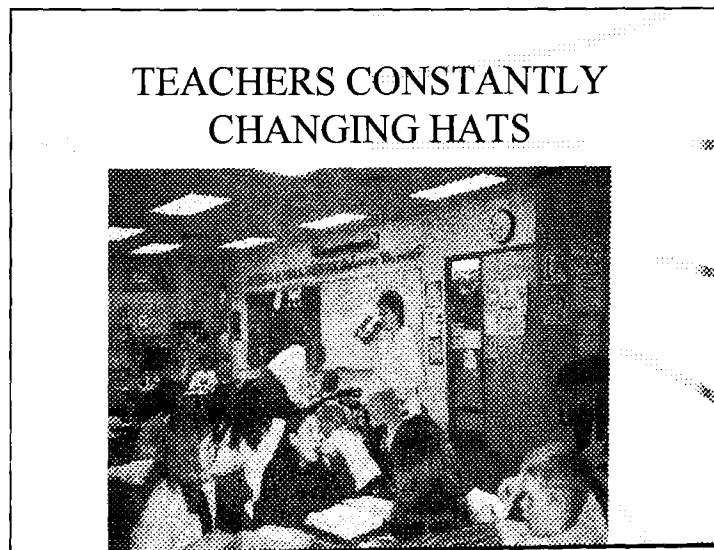
Slide 28



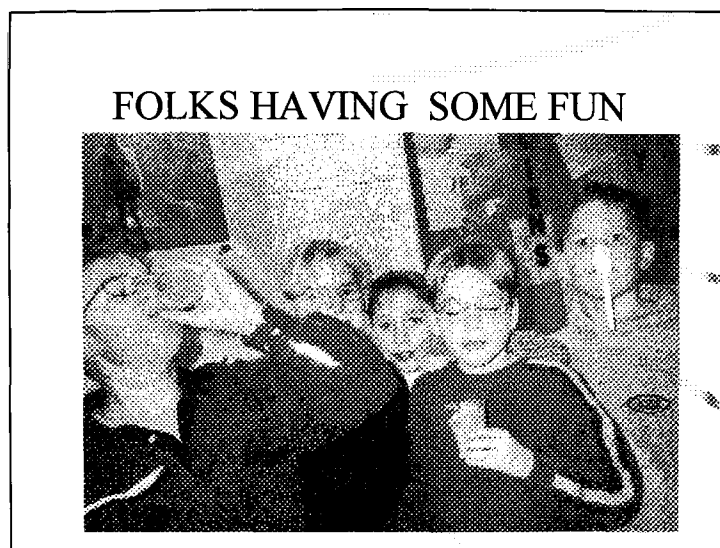
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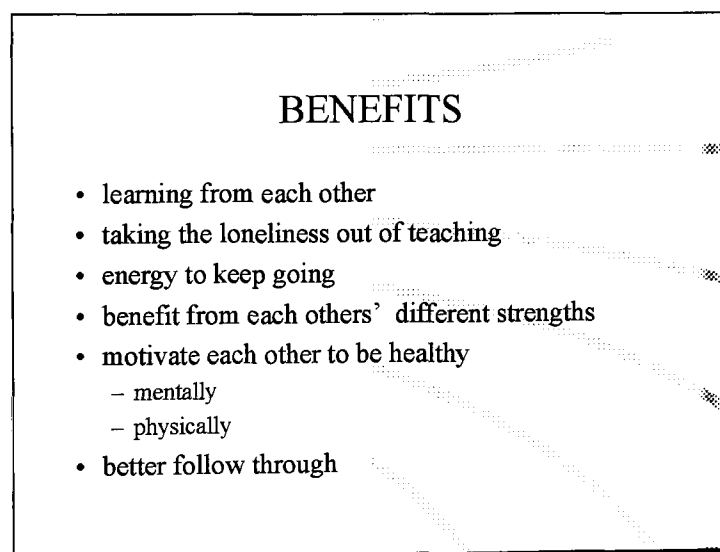
Slide 30



Slide 31



Slide 32



Slide 33

### MORE BENEFITS

- parent notification shared
- behavior issues dealt with quickly
- kids' needs are met by someone on the team
- planning more dynamic
- we remind each other of little details
- model teamwork
- able to balance the students' day

Slide 34

### EVEN MORE BENEFITS

- we reach more kids more often
- kids who need transition time get it
- we are teaching kids, not subjects
- classroom interruptions do not ruin the flow
- we are able to organize students quickly
- easier integration of subject matter

## Slide 35

**Science Paragraph**

I think our temperature and heat unit will be cool because I think maybe we will do lots of labs and we might get to use Bunsen burners and maybe show how integers help us in temperature and heat. I hope we will get to do free writing on it!

by: Tannis

## Slide 36

**WHY IT IS WORKING FOR US  
AND THE STUDENTS**

- Right team members
- More control over scheduling
- Constant communication with kids
- No stigma for kids
- More learning connections
- Administrative support
- Stress levels decreased
- Homework checks/ quick follow up
- Open and caring classroom


Slide 37



Slide 38

### EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

- kids have formed a close relationship with at least one adult
- students have a sense of ownership and pride
- academic success
- kids caring for kids

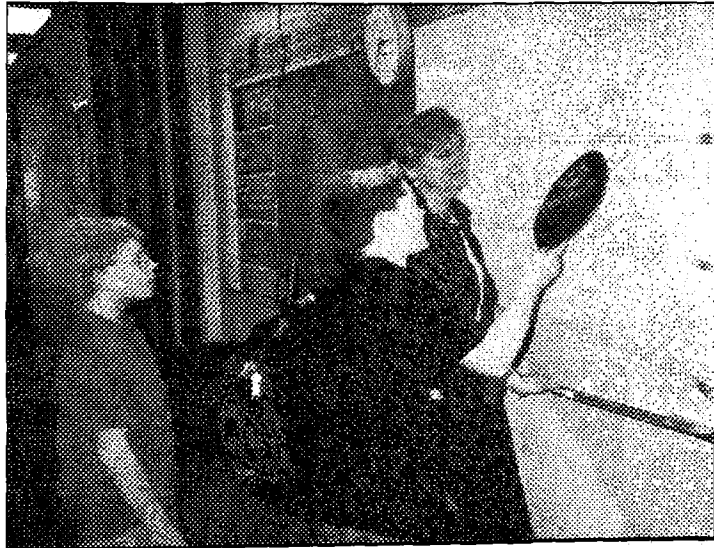
A small cartoon illustration of a child sitting on a chair. The child is wearing a hat and a coat, and is looking towards the viewer. The illustration is simple and stylized.



Slide 39



Slide 40



Slide 41

## CHALLENGES

- parent / teacher interviews
- team changes
- planning time
- coordinating evaluation
- accepting change
- report card preparation
- internal room temperature

Slide 42

## CHANGES AND/OR SUGGESTIONS

- make sure financial support is in place
- involve the entire school
- make sure ground rules are in place
- take time to get the right team members
- develop trust among team members
- never let each other down
- have a balanced class profile

Slide 43

