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Assessing Aspects of Professional Collaboration in Schools: Beliefs Versus Practices

Much has been written about the potential of professional collaboration to advance the purposes of schooling, yet much remains to be learned about the extent to which teachers themselves value such practices. This article reports the findings of a survey questionnaire completed by 565 randomly selected classroom teachers in 96 school districts in Western Canada. Using selected dimensions of organizational culture as the basis of inquiry, the researchers investigated teachers' perceptions regarding collaborative activities, diversity in education, the usage of teacher time, and the nature of professional relationships. Comparisons of teachers' espoused beliefs with impressions of actual conditions and circumstances in their schools reaffirmed some popular conceptions about the potential for high-involvement schools to realize educational goals. However, they also showed that teachers continue to wrestle with conflictual circumstances arising from the confluence of their own aspirations, the expectations of others, and the continuing limitations that severely curtail the realization of normative learning communities.

On a beaucoup écrit sur le potentiel qu'a la collaboration professionnelle de faire avancer les buts de l'éducation. Toutefois, il nous en reste beaucoup à apprendre sur ce que pensent les enseignants de telles pratiques. Cet article fait connaître les résultats d'une enquête réalisée auprès de 565 enseignants que l'on avait choisis au hasard dans 96 districts scolaires dans l'Ouest du Canada. Certains aspects de la culture organisationnelle ont été choisis pour former la base de l'enquête. Par le biais de ces aspects, les chercheurs ont sondé les perceptions des enseignants quant aux activités collaboratrices, à la diversité dans l'éducation, à l'emploi du temps des enseignants et à la nature des rapports professionnels. Des comparaisons entre les croyances auxquelles adhéraient les enseignants et les impressions des véritables conditions et circonstances existant dans leurs écoles ont permis de réaffirmer quelques conceptions populaires du potentiel des écoles à forte implicaction à atteindre leurs objectifs pédagogiques. Par contre, l'étude a également révélé que les enseignants continuent à se heurter contre des circonstances conflictuelles nées de la rencontre de leurs propres aspirations, des attentes d'autrui et des contraintes permanentes qui posent de sérieux obstacles à la réalisation de communautés normatives d'apprentissage.

Over the past decade, and motivated largely by the scholarly literature on school effectiveness and underlying democratic principles, expectations for the creation and maintenance of professionally collaborative cultures in schools have become increasingly prevalent. Although our knowledge and under-

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standing are expanding, the nature and nuances of the collaborative environment remain as substantial conundrums. Multiple and situationally specific factors constantly interplay to create complexities that often deflect—and at times defy—concerted attempts to identify commonalities that might permit generalizations from one context to another. In some respects, particularly in recognition of those elements that are evident in organizations deemed to exemplify highly collaborative cultures, this has been achieved. In others, such as in the successful introduction and continual growth of schools as so-called learning organizations, much needs to be determined. In an attempt to understand more about schools as professional learning communities, the study described in this article examined not only the context and substance of collaborative processes from the perspectives of practicing classroom teachers, but also the teachers' espoused conceptions of the appropriateness of those collaborative applications.

The Context of Organization Theory for Collaboration Research

Professional collaboration is a ubiquitous term that over time has acquired many and often nebulous meanings and properties in the school effectiveness and school improvement literature. Often touted as the very foundation of many educational reforms, collaborative practice is by extension a key component of greater stakeholder involvement, including various forms of site-based management, school council implementation, shared decision-making, and team teaching (da Costa & Riordan, 1996). Under the auspices of restructuring, researchers and policy-makers have been encouraging school administrators to promote increased collegial interaction based on precepts of collaboration (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hord, 1997; Rottier, 1996). However, the essence of this apparent disposition lies beyond these more recent structural and organizational phenomena.

At least part of the answer may be found by applying a lens of organization theory. Critics of organization theories that embody conceptualizations of leadership, decision making, and hierarchical arrangements rooted rigidly in scientific management and bureaucratic principles are substantial in number and are growing. Two decades ago Scott and Hart's (1979) dissatisfaction with traditional bureaucratic organizations was directed primarily toward management. In the field of educational administration Greenfield (1979) warned that organization theory oversimplified "the variety and complexity of human experience within organizations" (p. 97). Clearly the parameters for defining and understanding organizations in terms of leadership practices were being reconsidered and redrawn, the results of which meant a more comprehensive view of effective organizations, in particular those of leadership conceived in terms other than the rational, the legitimate, and the hierarchical.

In addition, alternative and more inclusive views of what constitutes a leader are given full consideration in contemporary treatises on leadership in public, private, and nonprofit organizations (Drucker, 1996). Reconceptualizations include, among others, notions of servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1977/1995; Pollard, 1996), transformational leaders (Burns, 1978/1995), principle-centered leaders (Covey, 1991), emotionally intelligent leaders (Goleman, 1998), and distributed leaders (Handy, 1996). These leadership concepts have their educational counterparts (Greenfield, 1980; Hodgkinson, 1991; Noddings, 1992;

Sarason, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1990; Starratt, 1993), particularly in the reconceptualizations of leadership that emphasize participation and the belief that there is no limit to who can be leader (Telford, 1996). In today's schools and school systems, the conception of verifiable shared leadership has taken hold in the popular mindset if not in prevailing practice. Consequently, the discourse on educational leadership in this respect, if not explicit, is at least implicit. Thrusts toward shared empowerment in schools through actors' "high involvement" are considered most likely to be successful if accompanied by facilitating collaborative structures and processes (Wohlstetter, Smyer, & Mohrman, 1994).

Educational Research into Collaboration

Understanding about collaborative school cultures has evolved over time. In a study of learning on the job undertaken almost 20 years ago, Little (1982) identified a number of collegial routines of "critical practices of adaptability" that distinguish more effective schools from those that are less successful:

- support for discussion of classroom practice,
- mutual observation and critique,
- shared curriculum design and preparation,
- joint work (shared participation in instructional improvement).

Later, in an extension of this framework, Fullan and Hargreaves (1991) contended that evidence of a collaborative culture may be found "in the life of the school" with indicators ranging from hard work to expressions of interest and understanding, and from celebrations to storytelling. This body of educational research on collaboration continues to grow (Blase & Blase, 1994; Cruz & Zaragoza, 1998; da Costa & Riordan, 1996; DiPardo, 1997; Fauske, 1999; Johnston & Hedemann, 1994; Knop, LeMaster, Norris, Raudensky, & Tannehill, 1997; Koehler & Baxter, 1997; Mitchell, 1997; Podeschi & Messenheimer-Young, 1998; Portner, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1989; Telford, 1996; Winter & Keedy, 1999). The purported benefits are many, but in essence the ultimate goal is teacher empowerment and development and by extension increased student empowerment, achievement, and development.

Typically, research into collaboration addresses particular components including, but not limited to, the following: the shared decision-making process (empowering teachers to be co-leaders in setting directions); the teacher accountability factor (the acknowledgment that the power to decide is accompanied by the responsibility for outcomes); the impact of trust and teacher self-efficacy on team teaching (the potential of evolving relationships for personal and professional growth); the moral dimension and purpose of the democratization of schools (the right of individuals to be heard and the provision of opportunities for diverse and minority views to enrich the whole); the attendant professional development benefits embedded in teachers' collaborative practices (e.g., mentoring, critical reflection, empowerment); and the relationship between collegiality and collaboration. On this last element, the scholarly literature sometimes uses the terms *collaboration* and *collegiality* interchangeably, a condition that has enhanced rather than curtailed the ambivalence about the nature of teacher professional relationships (Welch, 1998). Consequently, there are somewhat different approaches to defining teacher collaborative practice, and depending on the research focus, degrees of abstruseness persist.

Despite such definitional ambiguity, however, there is common acceptance that collegial environments are needed to nurture collaborative norms: in effect that professional sharing is a subset of professional regard, which itself is founded in respect and trust. For example, Barth (1990) considers collaboration to be a component of the broader collegial environment where staff members not only exhibit mutual respect, but also hold convictions that they are purposively working toward shared goals. Further to that point, Speck (1999) views collaborative norms to be indicators not only of the presence of professional collegiality, but also as a clear reflection of conscious efforts of "collegial culture-building" (p. 110) designed to transform a school into a true learning community.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, common and generally accepted characteristics of collaborative practice dictate that group members must: have a clear purpose (Knop et al., 1997; Leonard & Leonard, 1999); value diversity (Jordan, 1999); be trusting and trustworthy (Leonard, 1999; Walker, 1999); and be selfless (Knop et al.). Keeping these points in mind—and for the purposes of this work—collaboration is defined broadly and similarly to how Cavanagh and Dellar (1996) define it: Professional collaboration is evidenced when teachers and administrators work together, share their knowledge, contribute ideas, and develop plans for the purpose of achieving educational and organizational goals. In effect collaborative practice is exemplified when school staff members come together on a regular basis in their continuing attempts to be more effective teachers so that their students can become more successful learners. Embedded in this definition is the resolute recognition that the hierarchal leadership styles typically evidenced in schools of the past have given way to newer notions of teacher empowerment and common commitment to shared goals.

Challenges to Promoting Professional Collaboration
The notable cache of expanding research informs our understanding not only of the benefits of collaboration, but also of the challenges associated with establishing collaborative cultures in schools (Johnston & Hedemann, 1994). First, not all teachers recognize substantive value in teamwork, particularly if it is perceived to have been externally imposed. Indeed, in separate studies we have undertaken, some teachers indicated considerable ambivalence beyond more commonly identified barriers to the collaborative process. Leonard and Leonard (1999) reported that a majority of teachers actually considered collaboration-by-design—that is, what is undertaken in formal structures such as school committees—to have minimal effect in terms of promoting innovation and program improvement. In addition, in an examination of the collaborative process in the implementation of team teaching and committees at an elementary school, Leonard (1998) uncovered a number of inhibitors to collaboration. These inhibitors, or barriers, involved issues of teacher efficacy, time constraints, fragmented vision, competitiveness, and conflict avoidance. Other studies of collaboration address similar findings, particularly those related to problems associated with time, conflict management, and team competitiveness (DiPardo, 1997; Knop et al., 1997; Kruse & Louis, 1997; Welch, 1998). These data underscore the range and intensity of the problems teachers face when confronted with collaborative initiatives.

Establishing Collaborative Cultures

Emerging from the literature more recently is the recognition of the teacher's vital role in achieving a collegial and highly collaborative school culture. When teachers have common educational goals and hold similar beliefs and values about education, they are more likely to collaborate (Hord, 1997; Louis, 1994; Midley & Wood, 1993; Mitchell, 1995; Odden & Wohlstetter, 1995; O'Neill, 1995). Contextual to these and other inquiries and ruminations about collaborative school environments is the centrality of shared values and commitment. Consequently, careful consideration should be given to the nature and extent of teachers' fidelity and commitment to a collaborative professional culture.

Examining teachers' levels of commitment to the collaborative process is important, particularly in light of Senge's (1990) seminal discourse about so-called learning organizations. In this work he addresses a wide range of individuals' allegiances to an organizational goal or vision. Marked distinction is made between persons who are truly committed to a goal and those who are merely compliant because they wish to "please the boss" or be perceived as a "good soldier." As Senge argues, the difference between compliance and commitment can be pivotal in terms of success, as the former does not nearly approach the latter's level of clarity and dedication to the goal. As Fullan (1992) iterates, the disparity can have important implications in terms of teachers' fidelity to collaborative processes in the school. Arguably, teachers who are truly committed to collaboration—as opposed to merely compliant—are more likely to contribute to its realization.

For example, in Leonard's (1998) study of school culture, it was found that although the school under investigation outwardly appeared to be characterized by a high degree of collaboration, in reality it was not. Through a participative observational approach, the researcher pushed "past the layer of espoused values into underlying assumptions" (Schein, 1990, p. 112) to discover some indications that although teachers and administrators espoused the value of team teaching and committee work, a number of them held basic assumptions about the nature of working relationships that were in essence at variance with a collaborative value orientation. Notwithstanding this, however, these same teachers did not seem to be aware of any connection between underlying basic assumptions about the nature of organizational members' activities and relationships and the administratively promoted collaborative processes.

Investigating Collaborative Cultures: Examining Basic Assumptions and Values

The lack of recognition of possible latent conflict is not surprising when the basic assumptions behind collaborative value orientations are examined. According to Schein (1984), basic assumptions are "taken for granted," "invisible," and "preconscious." These basic assumptions are values that are deeply rooted and resistant to change (Begley, 1996). Schein's (1985, 1990, 1992) discussion of the underlying dimensions of an organization's culture is useful for understanding the basic assumptions associated with a collaborative value orientation and also for guiding researchers in uncovering these basic assumptions. Drawing on Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) classification of dominant and variant value orientations, Schein (1990, p. 114) presents seven

underlying dimensions of organizational culture. Four of these are significant for understanding the basic assumptions associated with a collaborative value orientation:

1. *The nature of human activity*: Is the "correct" way for humans to behave to be dominant/proactive, harmonizing, or passive/fatalistic? (In terms of teacher work: To what extent and under what circumstances might teachers engage in collaborative practices? To what extent are these activities desirable?)

2. *The nature of human relationships*: What is the "correct" way for people to relate to each other, to distribute power and affection? Is life competitive or cooperative? Is the best way to organize society on the basis of individualism or groupism? Is the best authority system autocratic/paternalistic or collegial/participative? (In terms of teacher professional relationships: To what extent are teachers involved in making decisions about the nature of their work? Is teacher work characterized by teamwork or competition? How important are caring and trusting relationships in achieving schooling goals?)

3. *Homogeneity vs. diversity*: Is the group best off if it is highly diverse or if it is highly homogeneous, and should individuals in a group be encouraged to innovate or conform? (In terms of teacher groups: To what extent are commonly held values and beliefs important for achieving schools goals? Are diverse opinions encouraged and individual needs addressed? Is consensus preferable to majority rule?)

4. *The nature of time*: What is our basic orientation in terms of past, present, and future, and what kinds of time units are most relevant for the conduct of daily affairs? (In terms of teacher work: Is collaboration appropriate usage of teacher time and, if so, is there sufficient opportunity to undertake it? Are there sufficiently high expectations for collaborative practice?)

A fundamental premise here is that values figure highly in the lives and interactions of educational stakeholders (Beck, 1996; Begley, 1996; Campbell-Evans, 1993; Greenfield, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1996; Roche, 1997) and they are manifested in both tangible and intangible ways (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992; Schein, 1990). Conceivably, teachers' and administrators' beliefs and values pertaining to these four identified dimensions may differ. In addition, and perhaps more important in the context of this research, these beliefs may be incompatible with a professionally collaborative culture. Moreover, teachers who espouse commitment to collaboration may merely, in Senge's (1990) and Fullan's (1992) terms, be compliant. In order to etch a clearer picture of how to arrive at a culture of collaboration, we need to understand better if teachers value the collaborative process. A better understanding of collaborative cultures requires a search for and examination of the intangible underlying values that come into play when individuals work together or independently of one another. An initial step in understanding the nature and function of values in the success or failure of collaborative initiatives is to examine how and to what extent these beliefs are reflected in actual common practice in the workplace. Consequently, the guiding questions articulated to provide direction to this study were: (a) To what extent do teachers value collaborative practices in schools? and (b) To what extent do teachers perceive collaborative processes

are actually occurring in their schools? As noted, Schein's (1985; 1990; 1992) framework for understanding the underlying dimensions of organizational culture was considered a useful tool for structuring a study of teachers' value orientations toward collaboration. Each of the four dimensions outlined above is related to the nature of collaboration and/or the barriers to successful implementation of collaborative initiatives (e.g., time constraints, competitiveness, conflict avoidance).

Method

Using Schein's (1985, 1990, 1992) underlying dimensions of organizational culture as a guiding framework, we developed a 55-item survey questionnaire for distribution to the teacher respondents. The survey questionnaire contained 40 Likert-scale items (ranging from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*) addressing each of the dimensions: the nature of teacher collaborative activity (6 items); the nature of teacher relationships (14 items); the nature of diversity (12 items); and the nature of teacher time (8 items). In the case of each dimension, we reached agreement on joint interpretations of Schein's conceptualizations based on the published articulation of the framework, as well as through personal insights acquired through our years of professional training and experiences in public school teaching and administration. In each category, survey items were presented in pairs. Teachers were asked to respond to the first paired-item "in terms of your personal beliefs about collaborative teacher practice" and the second paired-item "in terms of how you perceive actual conditions or circumstances at your school." As well, the instrument asked respondents to indicate from a prepared list the types of collaborative practices that "regularly occur in your school." An "other" option with an accompanying request for specificity was also provided. In open-ended format, teachers were also asked to indicate whether they "believe students achieve more as a direct consequence of professional collaboration among their teachers." The survey asked respondents to indicate additional information such as teaching experience, grade levels taught, school enrollment, school type, and sex. Only those aspects of the research incorporating the scale responses are addressed in this report.

The original instrument was subsequently revised following a piloting phase involving a group of eight schoolteachers from both urban and rural schools, with varying teaching assignments and experience, and representing both sexes. The oral and written feedback provided for refinements to both the structure and the content of the questionnaire. Using an appropriate computer software program, a stratified random sample of 1,000 classroom teachers (500 from urban schools, 500 from rural schools) was drawn from a population of 12,000 Province of Saskatchewan public schoolteachers. For purposes of reliability and validity in general terms, and for increased generalizability, no attempt was made to differentiate between either teachers or schools considered to be more or less inclined toward collaborative practices. Teachers receiving the surveys were employed in 472 schools including all common school configurations, that is, primary, elementary, middle schools, secondary, and all-grade schools. A questionnaire packet was mailed to each potential respondent and included a covering letter explaining the purpose of the study, the actual instrument further outlining the research intent and providing re-

sponse instructions, and a postage-paid envelope for returning the completed form. A reminder letter was mailed to all potential respondents two weeks after the initial distribution. A total of 565 completed surveys from more than 400 schools in 94 school districts were received for a return rate of 56.5%. The scale and demographic data were aggregated using the SPSS statistical software program, whereas open-ended responses were compiled and categorized manually along identified themes.

Results

As indicated above, four of Schein's (1990) underlying dimensions of organizational culture were used as lenses through which to examine teachers' espoused collaborative value orientations, as well as their perceptions of actual collaborative practices in their schools. Comparisons were made by applying paired sample tests (t-tests) to each pair of items to determine whether their means were statistically different. Scale internal reliability was determined to be .81.

Nature of Teacher Collaborative Activity

Table 1 contains the survey results about the aspects of teacher activity and are analogous to Schein's (1990) "human activity" dimension of organizational culture. Significantly, mean differences were found in all three pairings. In each case teachers scored their personal beliefs about the nature of their work higher than what they perceived to be reflected in actual circumstances in their schools. For example, although they indicated that teachers' work is necessarily highly collaborative (m=4.25, SD=.71), they scored actual collaborative practice (m=3.37, SD=.99) to be significantly less (p<.001). As well, although they personally considered professional collaboration among teachers to be highly desirable (m=4.42, SD=.66) they were less inclined to recognize that their fellow teachers were like-minded (m=3.60, SD=.89; p<.001). Another indication of respondents' dispositions to perceive their colleagues as being less inclined toward collaborative practice than they were themselves is apparent from the results of a related question positioned later in the survey. Almost one half (49%) of all respondents said that they considered themselves to be "more regularly involved in collaborative practices" than most of their fellow teachers.

The final pairing of items about the nature of teachers' collaborative activities addressed the matter of independent work toward shared goals. Again, there was a significant difference (p<.001) between what the respondents espoused (m=3.80, SD=.94) and what they considered to be actual practice in their schools (m=3.30, SD=.93). However, because both scores were relatively low and were accompanied by a comparatively low standard deviation (SD=0.88, paired differences), it would seem to indicate considerable trepidation about the desirability and potential of individual teachers to work toward shared school goals.

Nature of Teacher Relationships

Table 2 contains the survey results addressing the nature of teacher relationships, which parallels Schein's (1990) "human relationships" dimension of organizational culture. This category examined perspectives on how teachers and administrators regard each other as professionals, as well as the context of

Table 1

Comparison of Teachers' Beliefs About the Nature of Collaborative Practices
and the Extent to Which Such Collaboration Was Considered to
Occur in their Schools
(5-point Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

| Item (N=565) | Teacher Belief | | Actual Circumstance | | | |
	M	SD	M	SD	t	df
By necessity teacher work is highly collaborative	4.25	0.71	3.37	0.99	19.3	557
Teacher collaboration is highly desirable	4.42	0.66	3.6	0.89	21.12	562
Teachers can work independently toward common goals	3.8	0.94	3.3	0.93	13.25	561

Note. All paired means significantly different ($p<.001$).

their work in terms of involvement, responsibility, trust, and care. Again, in each case of paired items, the respondents scored their own beliefs of what should be significantly higher than they did the existing circumstances in their schools. (With the sole expectation indicated below, all were at the .001 alpha level). There was strong agreement with the statement "Schools should be characterized by high levels of participation in decision-making" ($m=4.36$, SD=.69) but less endorsement that their own schools were so characterized ($m=3.36$, SD=1.11). Respondents quite definitively indicated a belief that "Teaching should be more about cooperation and teamwork than about competition and individualism" ($m=4.60$, SD=.64), whereas reflections on actual circumstances were considerably less robust ($m=3.66$, SD=1.02). Similar results were apparent from those items addressing the essentiality of "trusting and caring" relationships to collaborative practice (belief $m=4.67$, SD=.53; actual $m=3.58$, SD=1.06); that trust among collaborating develops "when people place greater emphasis on the needs of the group as opposed to those of the individual" (belief $m=4.31$, SD=.74; actual $m=3.30$, SD=1.02); and that teachers collaborate better when they "genuinely like each other" (belief $m=4.40$, SD=.72; actual $m=3.54$, SD=.97).

The two other item pairings require singular notation. Both teacher belief ($m=3.29$, SD=1.21) and actual circumstances ($m=2.90$, SD=1.07) ratings were comparatively low in the statements suggesting that "The provision of teaching resources is largely the responsibility of school administrators." The suggestion that school administrators were best situated to "decide what is good for teachers and students" received even lower ratings (belief $m=2.32$, SD=.94; actual 2.40, SD=.93; $p<.05$). Although still statistically different, these scores appear to reflect a rejection of the conception that those in formal leadership positions are more capable of making decisions affecting group welfare and that they are required to assume sole responsibility for those decisions.

Nature of School Diversity
Table 3 contains the survey results about the nature of diversity in schools and are analogous to Schein's (1990) "homogeneity versus diversity" dimension of

Table 2
Comparison of Teachers' Beliefs About the Nature of Professional
Relationships and the Extent to Which Such Relationships Were Considered
to be Evident in Their Schools
(5-point Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Item (N=565)	Teacher Belief		Actual Circumstance			
	M	SD	M	SD	t	df
Schools characterized by high participation in decision making	4.36	0.69	3.36	1.11	18.11	561
Teaching more about cooperation and teamwork than about competition and individualism	4.6	0.64	3.66	1.02	20.23	562
Provision of resources responsibility of school administrators	3.29	1.21	2.9	1.07	7.56	558
School administrators in best position to decide what good for teachers and students	2.32	0.94	2.4	0.93	−2.41	561
Maintaining trusting and caring relationship is essential to collaborative practice	4.67	0.53	3.58	1.06	22.97	562
Trust more likely when people place greater emphasis on group needs than individual needs*	4.31	0.74	3.3	1.02	20.33	561
Teachers collaborate better when they genuinely like each other	4.4	0.72	3.54	0.97	19.17	560

Note. Unless otherwise indicated, all paired means significantly different (*p*<.001).
*Paired means for these items significantly different (*p*<.05).

organizational culture. Teachers rated the belief-oriented item of each set of paired statements higher than the actual school circumstances item on four of the six opportunities in this category of the survey. All mean differences were significant (*p*<.001). The respondents tended to agree with the statements "Schools function better when teachers have highly similar values and beliefs about schooling" (*m*=4.00, SD=.93) and "Diversity of opinion and practice maintain organizational health" (*m*=4.01, SD=.73). Actual circumstances in schools for both of those items were rated significantly lower (*m*=3.33, SD=1.02 and *m*=3.46, SD=.92, respectively). Teachers clearly indicated support to "attend to the needs and interests of individual students" (*m*=4.35, SD=.66) and perceived with the survey's highest survey actual circumstances mean of 4.04 (SD=.82) signified that they largely considered it to be occurring in their schools. There was less support for the notion that the "processes of conflict resolution are often more important than the actual outcomes" (*m*=3.53, SD=.93) and still less for circumstances actually considered to be the case in schools (*m*=2.93, SD=.93).

The final two item pairings in the category resulted in teachers' beliefs receiving lower scores than perceived actual school circumstances. Both sets addressed decision-making based on principles of majority voting. With a low mean of 2.91 (SD=.1.10) respondents provided weak support for the idea that

Table 3
A Comparison of Teachers' Beliefs About the Nature of Human Diversity and
the Extent to Which Those Beliefs Were Considered to be Manifest in Their
Schools
(5-point Likert scale: 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree)

| Item (N=565) | Teacher Belief | | Actual Circumstance | | | |
	M	SD	M	SD	t	df
Schools function better when teachers have highly similar values and beliefs about schooling	4	0.93	3.33	1.02	14.21	562
Diversity of opinion and practice maintain organizational health	4.01	0.73	3.46	0.92	12.99	561
It is important for individuals to adhere to majority expectations	2.93	1.04	3.2	0.9	−5.72	559
Majority vote preferable to consensus in resolving disagreement	2.91	1.1	3.27	1.02	−6.43	558
Conflict resolution processes more important that actual outcomes	3.53	0.93	2.93	0.93	12.33	559
Schools should make strong efforts to attend to the needs and interests of individual students	4.35	0.66	4.04	0.82	8.07	559

Note. All paired means significantly different ($p<.001$).

"the best way to resolve disagreement is through the practice of majority votes rather than consensus attainment." However, there was greater perception that this was what indeed was happening in their schools ($m=3.27$, SD=1.02). Similarly, there was limited support for the statement "It is important for individuals to conform to the expectations of the majority" ($m=2.93$, SD=1.04), yet greater recognition that this was what indeed was extant in their schools ($m=3.20$, SD=.90).

Nature of Time Usage
Table 4 contains the survey results about the nature of time use in schools and are analogous to Schein's (1990) time dimension of organizational culture. This category of the survey precipitated large discrepancies between what the teachers espoused and what they reported as the actual circumstances in their schools ($p<.001$ in all cases). With the greatest mean difference of all paired items (belief $m=4.62$, SD=.57; actual $m=2.23$, SD=.98), respondents clearly demonstrated that they believe teachers do not have "sufficient time to work together professionally." They also professed the belief that professional collaboration was "an appropriate use of teachers' time" ($m=4.33$, SD=.69), but perceived in their schools that it was considered to be less so ($m=3.52$, SD=1.00). There was relatively modest support for the statement "Expectations of collaborative practice influence teachers' use of their time" ($m=3.40$, SD=.84) and significantly less for the notion that such expectations actually influence teachers' collaborative practice in their schools ($m=2.79$, SD=.90). Last, there was also comparatively moderate support for the notion that "the amount of time avail-

Table 4
Comparison of Teachers' Beliefs About the Nature of Time Usage and the
Extent to Which the Beliefs Were Apparent in Their Schools
(5-point Likert scale: 1=strong disagree to 5=strongly agree)

Item (N=565)	Teacher Belief		Actual Circumstance			
	M	SD	M	SD	t	df
Teachers need sufficient time to work together professionally	4.62	0.57	2.23	0.98	46.54	559
Frequent professional collaboration is an appropriate use of teachers' time.	4.33	0.69	3.52	1	17.16	557
Expectations of collaborative practice influence teachers' use of time.	3.4	0.84	2.79	0.9	13.91	560
Amount of available time should dictate what is undertaken in schools.	3.7	1.03	3.42	1.13	4.44	555

Note. All paired means significantly different ($p<.001$).

able should dictate what is undertaken in schools" ($m=3.70$, SD=1.03) and that it is actually a factor in their schools ($m=3.42$, SD=1.13).

Analysis and Discussion

A number of important considerations emerged from the aggregated data received from the 565 randomly selected survey respondents working throughout the Province of Saskatchewan and these would seem to provide additional information pertaining to the four dimensions of collaborative culture. What follows is an analysis and discussion of these findings in the four-dimension framework of this study. In addition, each section concludes with a summary statement capturing the essential finding for that data set.

The data provided interesting insights into teachers' beliefs concerning collaborative practices, as well as the extent to which they consider those practices to be manifest in their schools. These results in turn produce a number of notable implications for those interested in creating or maintaining collaborative school cultures. For example, in terms of the nature of teacher activity (see Table 1), the respondents demonstrated strong recognition that by necessity teachers' work should be highly collaborative, yet they indicated that they witnessed significantly less collaboration in schools than was deemed desirable (belief $m=4.25$, SD=.71; actual $m=3.37$, SD=.99; $p<.001$). With relatively low scores on the 5-point scale, there appeared to be a degree of ambivalence about teacher activity in terms of the ability of teachers to work independently toward common goals (belief $m=3.80$, SD=.94; actual $m=3.30$, SD=.93; $p<.001$). It may be conjectured that the source of this apparent uncertainty might be as much a consequence of the failure to identify common goals as it could be the potential for individuals to achieve them. Additional inquiry is needed here and might best be pursued through in-depth interview and observation studies. Notwithstanding this, however, the data suggest the following.

Finding 1: Teachers perceive less collaboration occurring in their schools than they consider desirable.

The data incorporating aspects of the nature of the teachers' professional relationships dimension of the study uncovered several illuminating findings (see Table 2). Perhaps the most notable is that the teachers clearly demonstrated a marked departure from the traditional expectation that those in positions of formal authority should make the choices about what is "good" for them and their students. They provided low support for the idea that school administrators are best able to make such decisions (m=2.32, SD=.94) and indicated that there is little evidence in their own schools that administrators were so equipped (m=2.40, SD=.93). There was, however, greater support for administrators taking responsibility for resource acquisition (m=3.29, SD=1.03), but less recognition that it actually occurs in their schools (m=2.90, SD=1.07).

There was strong support for many of the key elements of collaborative school cultures, that is: that schools should be characterized by high levels of participative decision making (m=4.36, SD=.69); that teaching is best undertaken in an environment of teamwork (m=4.60, SD=.64); that relationships based on mutual caring and trust are essential ingredients (m=4.67, SD=.53); that people should put group needs above individual needs (m=4.31, SD=.75); and that collaboration is more successful when those involved truly like each other (m=3.54, SD=.97). In each of these aspects, however, actual school conditions were rated significantly lower (p<.001 in almost all cases). This and the apparent readiness and willingness to assume enhanced responsibility discussed above provide potent indicators that the teachers were decided believers in the importance of the creation and maintenance of professionally collaborative school environments. This second emergent finding may be stated as follows:

Finding 2: Teachers espoused the desire for expanded roles and professional relationships in terms of decision-making and collaborative practice, but felt that current school circumstances were curtailing such developments.

The teachers conveyed some clear messages through their responses to the organizational dimension addressing aspects of diversity in schools. Although they were statistically different (p<.001), they gave high scores both to the belief that schools should strongly address the needs and interests of individual students (m=4.35, SD=.66) and that such was indeed occurring in their schools (m=4.04, SD=.82). They were considerably less definitive about other features of diversity, however. For example, although they were relatively demonstrative in terms of their beliefs about the benefits of teachers sharing similar values and beliefs about schooling (m=4.00, SD=.93) and about diversity of opinion being a condition of healthy organizations (m=4.01, SD=.73), their estimations of actual school circumstances in those respects were significantly lower (m=3.33, SD=1.02 and m=3.46, SD=.92 respectively; p<.001). In addition, there seemed to be a high degree of ambivalence in terms of processes for resolving issues and for making decisions when diverse perspectives were present.

There was moderate agreement that conflict resolution processes are of greater import than the actual outcomes (m=3.53, SD=.93) and relatively low concurrence that processes took precedence over outcomes in their own

schools (*m*=2.93, SD=.93). To reinforce these positions the respondents indicated that they believed there was an overreliance on acceptance of majority rule. Actual school circumstances in terms of the individual adherence to majority expectations (*m*=3.20, SD=.89) and the use of majority vote rather than consensus (*m*=3.27, SD=1.02) both outscored teacher beliefs that such should be the case (*m*=2.92, SD=1.04 and *m*=2.91, SD=1.10 respectively). It appears—with the possible exception of the amount of attention given to meeting individual students' needs and interests—that teachers' personal perspectives on the considered aspects of school diversity countervail the circumstances that most perceive to be manifest in their schools. Stating the above considerations in more concise form:

Finding 3: With the possible exception of sensitivity to individual student needs and interests, the teachers felt that inadequate worth was given to school diversity in terms of values, beliefs, conflict resolution processes, and consensus-building.

The organizational culture dimension pertaining to the nature of time usage provided the most marked difference in a paired set of items. Respondents resoundingly demonstrated that they believed the time available to teachers to undertake professional collaborative practices was woefully inadequate (belief *m*=4.62, SD=.57; actual *m*=2.23, SD=.98; *p*<.001). They also indicated that although they believed professional collaboration was an appropriate use of teachers' time (*m*=4.33, SD=.69), the opportunities for engaging in such activities were substantially less (*m*=3.52, SD=1.00). As well, there was limited support for the notion that teachers practice collaboration because it is expected of them (*m*=2.79, SD=.90) although there was a considerably stronger affiliation with the view that such should be the case (*m*=3.40, SD=.84). Although it was significantly different, there was relative concordance between teacher beliefs (*m*=3.70, SD=1.03) and actual school circumstances (*m*=3.42, SD=1.03) with respect to available time being a determinant of what activities teachers undertake in schools. This would seem to indicate that the influences of time as pivotal factors both in conception and in reality are reasonably congruent.

Finding 4: Although teachers demonstrated strong convictions that professional collaboration was an appropriate use of their time, they felt that they were unable to partake in such processes to the extent desirable and necessary.

Conclusions and Implications

At the risk of stating what may be the obvious, it must be reiterated here that there are increasing expectations that educators regularly exemplify collaborative processes and practices. Theoretical argumentation, and to a lesser extent empirical evidence, have provided firm support for proponents who contend that schools that are characterized by strong cultures of shared professional work are predisposed to be more successful in terms of school effectiveness (DiPardo, 1997; Hargreaves, 1994; Little, 1982).

Although numerous studies have addressed the apparent benefits of professional sharing in terms of organizational improvement, professional development, and student outcomes, there seems to have been limited inquiry into how teachers themselves perceive this evolving phenomenon. The investigation described in this article was designed to provide a vehicle for teachers in one western Canadian province to voice their perspectives both in terms of

what they believed about professional collaboration and the extent to which they considered it to be evident in their schools.

Five-hundred, sixty-five classroom teachers from more than 400 schools and almost 100 school systems completed a survey questionnaire comprising paired sets of items—one pertaining to their beliefs, the second to actual school circumstances. The study was based on four of Schein's (1990) dimensions of organizational culture and was premised on the supposition that the extent to which teachers value collaborative practice, as well as how they assess its prevailing manifestations, can have important consequences for the capacity of collaboration to realize touted purposes. An analysis of the emergent data allowed us to identify four essential findings pertaining to the selected collaborative dimensions. Concomitant with these essential findings are corollary conclusions and implications that are considered here both in terms of what they may mean for current practices and for implications for future endeavors. These considerations are presented in summary form in Table 5 and further addressed below.

Participants in this study professed robust support for the overriding concept that professional practice and teacher activity should be highly collaborative. This is an important affirmation, particularly as "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves, 1989) or "collaboration-by-design" (Leonard & Leonard, 1999) may have potentially deleterious influences on efforts to create cultures of high involvement. Articulating a belief in the value of collaboration is at least a good starting point from which to establish a collaborative culture. Arguably, collaboration would be less likely to occur if teachers did not wish to participate. Nonetheless, as underscored above, certain conditions (DiPardo, 1997; Knop et al., 1997; Leonard & Leonard, 1999; Leonard, 1998) can act as barriers to authentic collaboration, even when teachers espouse the desire to engage in it. Although this study did not address inhibitors to collaboration specifically, we do know that despite their professed desire to collaborate, the teacher participants agreed that teamwork and shared decision-making in their schools were less common than desirable. In other words, the extent of collaborative work occurring in their schools was deficient. Interestingly, and perhaps important for understanding one reason why collaborative practice was not more evident, teachers felt that there were insufficient expectations for them to engage in collaborative decision-making and other collaborative activities.

In terms of teachers' beliefs about the nature of professional relationships, teachers in this study believed that teaching should be based on cooperation and teamwork. However, they perceived their schools as characterized by competition and individualism to greater degrees than desirable. Teachers also saw people liking each other as important to collaborative ventures. Accordingly, they believed that professional collaboration would be enhanced if there were a greater affinity among teachers. Yet they were less inclined to see evidence of this in their own schools. Moreover, the data suggested that the respondents' schools were not characterized by the extent of trusting, caring environments deemed conducive for collaborative activities. The importance of trust among colleagues as a prerequisite to establishing a collaborative culture should not be underestimated, nor should the existence of trust among colleagues be taken for granted. Nevertheless, da Costa and Riordan (1996), in

Table 5
Summary Conclusions Based on Data Pertaining to the
Four Essential Findings.

Beliefs about Teacher Activity

- Teachers articulate that they firmly believe in the benefits of professional collaboration;
- Teachers' daily work does not sufficiently reflect the precepts of teamwork;
- Participation in school decision making remains deficient;
- Teachers feel that their administrators are primarily responsible for providing the school with resources, but they refute the idea that those same persons are better equipped to make important decisions that affect others;
- There are insufficient expectations at the school level that teachers regularly engage in collaborative practices.

Beliefs about Teacher Relationships

- Schools are not characterized by trusting, caring school environments to the extent desirable;
- Individualism and competitiveness continue to counter collaborative initiatives degrees in schools;
- Professional collaboration would be enhanced if there were greater affinity among teachers.

Beliefs about Diversity

- Teachers believe that schools would function better if:
  a. teachers were more inclined to have common values and beliefs,
  b. people were less confined by majority voting and majority expectations,
  c. schools placed more emphasis on the processes of conflict resolution, and
  d. continued efforts were made to address individual needs.

Beliefs about Time

- Teachers' collaborative practices are severely constrained by inadequate time availability;
- Teachers need additional time to engage in professional collaboration.

their study of teacher efficacy and collaboration, posited that "a major assumption made by those advocating the use of teacher collaboration ... is that a climate of trust exists" (p. 3). Research into teacher collaboration supports the notion that trust is fundamental to developing positive interpersonal relationships among groups of people working together to achieve shared goals (Blase & Blase, 1994).

The findings in this study regarding teachers' beliefs about diversity suggest that although they believed that schools function better when teachers share common values and beliefs, they also agreed that divergent opinions and practices were indicative of a healthy organization. Moreover, there was substantially low belief that the wishes of the majority should be imposed on the individual. An important implication is embedded in these findings. Although teachers believed it was desirable to hold common beliefs, the significance of which is strongly supported elsewhere in the literature (Hord, 1997; Louis, 1994; Midley & Wood, 1993; Mitchell, 1995; Odden & Wohlsetter, 1995; O'Neil, 1995), they did not express agreement that majority beliefs should be imposed school-wide. This would indicate that respondents in general believed in a more democratic process for negotiating and mitigating conflicting beliefs and values than may be reflected in diverse groups. Support for this inference is contained in the finding that these teachers also indicated that schools should place more emphasis on the conflict resolution process rather than on conflict

resolution outcomes. This, however, was not felt to be the actual general circumstances in the respondents' schools.

Not surprisingly, especially in consideration of popular perceptions, there was strong support for the notion that expending time on collaborative practices was appropriate. Also, in reaffirmation of findings of previous studies, there was emphatic recognition that teachers were not allotted sufficient time for collaboration. More illuminating, however, was the indication that many teachers believed that they were not expected to use their time in collaborative ventures to the extent that most regarded as desirable.

In summary, the implications of the findings in this study suggest that, first, more research is needed in terms of addressing the role of principals in setting expectations for creating collaborative cultures and facilitating teachers' commitment to, as opposed to compliance with, organizational goals (Fullan, 1992; Senge, 1990). Second, the relationship between establishing a climate of trust and creating a culture of collaboration also needs attention. If trust is indeed "the foundation for shared governance and teacher empowerment" (Blase & Blase, 1994, p. 18) then we need to focus our attention on how trust may help overcome many of the previously described barriers to collaboration, particularly those related to self-efficacy, conflict avoidance, and competitiveness. Third, if collaborative endeavors are to meet with sufficient degrees of success, then teachers need to develop proficiency in consensus-building, decision-making, and the processes of conflict resolution whereby the means become as important as the ends. How teachers interact with each other to resolve differences, arrive at joint decisions, and identify shared purposes has significant implications for the endurance of collaborative relationships. In other words, teachers need to acquire and implement appropriate professional strategies that will serve to engender trusting collaborative partnerships. None of this, of course, abrogates the fundamental question as to whether long-entrenched practices that are noncollaborative in nature can or should be overcome. The vast majority of the teachers involved in this research clearly indicated that they felt they should, but there was also explicit and implicit recognition both that expectations must heighten and actual circumstances must improve to permit it to happen to the extent desirable.

Finally, the ubiquitous issue of time, or perhaps more accurately the lack thereof, needs to be addressed. Elsewhere, in deliberations about time as a barrier to collaboration, it has been speculated that when priorities and expectations are clear, then perhaps "constraints on time might be a manageable issue" (Leonard, 1999, p. 104). Admittedly there is a certain naiveté in this supposition and it is not intended to diminish the importance of seriously considering ways to reschedule timetables and to allot sufficient time for teachers to collaborate. Still, the finding that there were insufficient expectations at the school level that teachers regularly engage in collaborative practices suggests that there is a marked discrepancy between espoused beliefs and practice that goes beyond the issue of time. Perhaps fundamental to this discussion, then, are three factors considered pivotal in creating a collaborative culture: clear expectations for teacher activity to be collaborative; the cultivation of trusting collegial relationships; and the development of proficiency in the processes of group work. Although attempts to create a collaborative school

culture may be considered by many to be a daunting challenge, further investigation into these three areas should be beneficial to those who wish to strengthen the connection between teachers' beliefs and their practices. Although the use of quantitative investigation methods and statistical analysis may have provided some additional information and insights into this complex phenomenon, only deeper, richer qualitative investigations—including, but not limited to, various forms of ethnographic inquiry and action research—are likely to move us substantially further toward fuller comprehension.

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