Commitment and Compliance:
Curious Bedfellows in Teacher Collaboration
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Abstract

Teacher collegiality has been used rhetorically to support a wide range of sometimes contradictory initiatives, from teacher development to school effectiveness, from a panacea for an aging teaching force to a well spring of innovation. There is also considerable scepticism about the ways in which collegiality can be used on co-opt teachers or control their work. Hargreaves (1994) has written extensively about a culture he describes as "contrived collegiality". His notion that contrived collegiality exists as a state in opposition to a culture of collaboration is thought provoking. However, this paper argues that it is not as simple as that in reality. Intensive case study research suggests that it is possible to have components of both these states working side by side in one school. The case study that underpins the paper finds that the definitions of collegial cultures are too narrow to adequately describe the practicalities of collegial staff relationships.

The data reveal that in a regular, middle-sized primary school, characteristics of both contrived collegiality and collaborative culture coexist. Much of the collaborative work is spontaneous and voluntary, development oriented, and pervades both time and space. However, there are other parts of collaborative work which are more regulated or contrived by principals. There is an element of collaboration built into the work of all teachers. The school's leaders are comfortable with the knowledge that all teachers do not collaborate to the same extent, and feel that staff morale and student learning do not suffer because of this. Collegial consonance is not destroyed by a degree of either isolation or compulsory collaboration. Healthy staff relationships may be the glue of the collegial bond.
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Introduction

Studying the work of teachers is not a new activity. The seminal works of Jackson (1968) and Lortie (1975) are still highly relevant today. The latter is frequently quoted in studies of teacher relationships some twenty-five years after publication because researchers are still curious about the seeming lack of collegiality amongst teachers. The theoretical debate about the benefits of teacher collegiality and collaboration continues, but at the same time it needs to be grounded in empirical data. This paper does exactly that. It discusses the notion of teacher collegiality based on an intensive case-study of staff relationships in an urban primary school.

The paper outlines the difficulties in defining collegiality and collaboration and provides a working definition of these terms. It briefly highlights some of the perceived positives and negatives of collegiality gleaned from a review of current literature and then proceeds to discuss two specific cultures of teaching outlined by Hargreaves (1994) as "contrived collegiality" and "collaborative culture". These teaching cultures are contrasted with the realities of collegial practices in the case-study school.

Various aspects of the experience of collegiality for teachers in the case-study school are outlined in the paper, giving rise to the suggestion that the two teacher cultures as defined by Hargreaves (1994) are too rigid to explain the reality of collegial work for primary school teachers. Instead, variations in collaborative practices can co-exist in a single school without serious detriment to teaching and learning. Importantly, some element of collaboration is built into the work of every teacher. However, the minimum level of this may depend on organisational and cultural influences, not least being the current state of staff relationships within the school.

Defining collegiality and collaboration

Herein lies the dilemma for researchers. The two terms 'collegiality' and 'collaboration' are used extensively in literature, often interchangeably, but authors do not necessarily agree on what they mean. In fact, Hargreaves (1994) suggests that there is no such thing as 'real' or 'true' collegiality or collaboration, but many forms of them exist, each serving a different purpose and with a different consequence. Hargreaves notes that the term 'collegiality' is quite vague and imprecise, and therefore is open to interpretation. He suggests that it is "mostly symbolic; motivating rhetorics in a mythical discourse of change and improvement" (p. 164). Little (1990a, p. 509) agrees, maintaining that the term "has remained conceptually amorphous and ideologically sanguine."

Smyth (1991), coming from a critical, labour process perspective, asserts that collegiality is "not simply a matter of teachers conferring with one another" (p. 325) and is "much more than a desirable teacher-to-teacher relationship" (p. 327). However, common usage seems to dictate otherwise. Campbell and Southworth (1992) suggest that many people use the term as if it were commonly understood, but that that understanding generally only means that teachers should 'work together'. Their review of collegiality concludes that "collegiality is a hazy and imprecise notion" (p. 65).
Nevertheless, the terms ‘collegiality’ and ‘collaboration’ need to be defined for the purpose of this research. Although authors like Little (1990a, 1990b) and Hargreaves (1994) make little distinction between collegiality and collaboration, there is benefit in doing so since it permits a greater understanding of the relationships which shape teachers’ working lives. Since the study involves observing and talking to teachers about collegial practices, common usage understandings are appropriate. To this end, ‘collegiality’ is used in its common English language meaning, as a derivation of ‘colleague’, to describe teachers’ involvement with their peers on any level, be it intellectual, social and/or emotional. ‘Collaboration’ in this study takes its meaning again from common English usage to mean teachers working in combination. In this way, collaboration is a subset of collegiality, as the former relates only to professional activities conducted with peers while the latter encompasses both professional and social interaction in the workplace.

Collegiality thus defined embraces communal associations in the workplace in a much broader sense than collaboration permits. Collegiality used in this manner allows a researcher to investigate the social and emotional aspect of the experience of teachers working with others in schools, as well as the professional or intellectual aspect. It encompasses the whole gamut of activities in which teachers become involved at the school level with their colleagues. This includes the all-important aspect of decision-making in schools, one factor which authors like Hargreaves (1994) and Little (1982, 1990a, 1990b) do not consider. Since teachers’ work is not solely confined to the classroom, collegial practices should also not be limited in this way.

Researchers largely neglect the social and emotional aspects of collegiality because they consider them irrelevant to improving classroom practice. They rate teachers’ wellbeing in the workplace unimportant beside student learning. Fortunately, Nias (1998, p. 1262) does not take this attitude, and her research provides strong grounds for justifying an expanded view of teacher collegiality in stating that

the welfare of the children [is] intimately bound up with the well-being of the adults who worked with them. If the latter did not feel accepted as people in the staffroom, they would not be fully at ease in the classroom. Besides, it [is] philosophically inconsistent to treat children as ‘whole’ and ‘individual’ but to ignore the personhood of their teachers.

Some positive and negative perceptions of collegiality

Collegiality in practice involves a variety of interchanges amongst teachers. Little (1990a) suggests that some activities that pass as collegiality do little to impact on teachers’ classroom practice. While this is not disputed, it does not mean that they are irrelevant to teachers or that they do not serve other purposes vital to coping with the demands of teaching as a profession. Little (1982) observed a series of over 60 routine interactions amongst teachers in the course of their work, but she narrowed down to four what she considered the basic components of collegiality. As colleagues, teachers talk about teaching, share planning and preparation, observe one another in the classroom and both train one another and together (Little, 1990b). On these grounds Little (1990b) concludes that true collegiality is a rarity in schools. However, Little’s four elements do not have to be taken as a definitive list of collegial practices. As noted previously, it does not include the work that teachers may do together in sharing leadership through participative decision making at the school level, nor their interactions at the social and emotional levels, both of which contribute to the collegial culture of the school.

As implied in the discussion on definitions of collegiality, both Hargreaves (1994) and Little (1990a) maintain that collegiality is associated by many with positive benefits. It is frequently
seen as the opposite of conditions of teacher isolation such as individualism (Hargreaves) or privatism (McTaggart, 1989), notions of which frequently engender negative feelings in the education community. Hargreaves suggests that this view of individualism is too harsh. However, given the plethora of literature promoting collegial practices in one way or another as a key to school improvement (see for example Lieberman, 1990; Sergiovanni, 1990; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Gossen & Anderson, 1995; Telford, 1996) there is a persistent belief that there are many advantages to teacher collaboration.

One perceived benefit of collegial practice in schools has been put forward by Fullan (1991), who maintains that educational change is more successful when teachers work collaboratively. The acceptance of new ideas is encouraged through what he calls "the primacy of personal contact" amongst teachers (p. 132). Taking that argument further, educational outcomes for students can also be improved by the successful adoption of new teaching practices. However, Little (1990b) suggests that the benefits to students from teacher collegiality are not totally convincing.

However, Little (1990b) does suggest that there are practical benefits for teachers and the school community in general. The orchestration of teachers' daily work is improved because teachers are better prepared to support one another. The school community gains more confidence and understanding of the programs being taught across the school. Teachers become more flexible in times of change and are better able to cope with new demands that would normally exhaust the energies of teachers working alone.

As expected, new and beginning teachers can greatly benefit from a collegial environment (Little, 1990b; Nias, 1998) but many mature teachers also welcome collaboration (Nias). Skilled practitioners frequently "look to other teachers both for new ideas, stimulation and challenge and as the potential recipients of their own knowledge and expertise" (Nias, p. 1264). Teachers also seek emotional support from the important to realise that conflict is not always harmful, and proper resolution of conflict can lead to the generation of better ideas and superior solutions to problems.

Collegiality has often been hailed as the solution to individualism and the isolation of teachers. However, taken further, it is suggested that collegiality can suppress individuality and subject teachers to 'groupthink' (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). Hargreaves (1994) argues that it is foolish to presume that all teacher individualism is wrong. He maintains that important aspects of teacher individualism such as care, individuality, creativity and solitude should not be purged for the sake of embracing collegiality.

On a totally different front, Smyth (1991) maintains that the introduction of collegial practices in schools is a form of central control disguised as local autonomy. Using a labour process perspective, he asserts that collegiality is used to "harness teachers more effectively to the work of economic restructuring" (p. 324). Brundrett (1998) is another strong critic of collegiality. As well as supporting Smyth’s notion of control, he also argues that collegiality can endanger the efficiency of the school, as well as compromise the position of the duly appointed leader. He maintains that as well as slowing down the decision-making process in a school, principals can be put in a difficult legal position if they are forced to accept the decisions made by a collegial staff. Brundrett supports the idea that participation in the decision-making process is an essential component of collegiality.

While debate on the benefits of implementing collegial practices in schools continues, Hargreaves (1994) takes up the notion that genuine collaboration in schools cannot and should not be engineered by school or system administrators. Hargreaves outlines various cultures of teaching, each being characterised by certain "patterns of relationships and forms
of association between members of those cultures" (p. 166). Two of these forms of culture, ‘contrived collegiality’ and ‘collaborative culture’, are particularly relevant to this paper.

**Collaborative culture and contrived collegiality**

Hargreaves (1994) uses a micropolitical perspective, as opposed to the more common cultural perspective, to analyse collegiality. The use of a micropolitical perspective opens up for consideration the possibility that collegiality and collaboration are imposed on teachers as an exercise in organisational power. Hargreaves describes collegiality that is controlled by administrators and is used as a means of co-opting teachers to fulfil administrative purposes as ‘contrived collegiality’. Opposed to this is a more spontaneous form of collegiality he terms a ‘collaborative culture’. The five characteristics he uses to compare these forms of culture are shown in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: Comparison of characteristics of cultures described by Hargreaves (1994)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLABORATIVE CULTURE</th>
<th>CONTRIVED COLLEGIALITY</th>
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<tr>
<td>Spontaneous</td>
<td>Administratively regulated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voluntary</td>
<td>Compulsory</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development-oriented</td>
<td>Implementation-oriented</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pervasive across time and space</td>
<td>Fixed in time and space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unpredictable outcome</td>
<td>Predictable outcome</td>
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These forms of teacher culture differ substantially. Hargreaves (1994, p. 192) suggests that collaborative cultures “emerge primarily from the teachers themselves as a social group”. This point about the social group will be revisited in a later section of this paper as it is an important observation. Although Hargreaves allows that they may be administratively supported and facilitated, he maintains that collaborative cultures arise because teachers themselves see the value of working this way, and find it both enjoyable and rewarding. Contrived collegiality, on the other hand, arises through administrative control, and is imposed on the teachers regardless of their desires. This takes the voluntary and spontaneous nature out of the working relationship.

Hargreaves (1994) also maintains that contrived collegiality is implementation-oriented, in that it serves the purposes of administration rather than the purpose being selected by teachers themselves, as is the case in collaborative cultures. Therefore, the outcomes of the former are predictable, but the latter are unpredictable. “When they [teachers] do have to respond to external mandates, they do so selectively, drawing on their professional confidence and discretionary judgment as a community” (Hargreaves, p. 192). Significantly, Hargreaves argues that work in a collaborative culture is pervasive across time and space. It is not tied to formalised meeting times and specific locations as is the case with contrived collegiality. Even though they form part of it, Hargreaves contends that scheduled meetings and planning sessions do not dominate the arrangements for teachers working together in a collaborative culture.
Hargreaves (1994) descriptors for contrived collegiality and collaborative cultures suggest that the situation in a school must be ‘either-or’, in that there is little ground in between the two. This, however, does not appear to be the reality in describing patterns of interaction for teachers in the primary school which was used as a case study in this research. Below are some findings that challenge the notion that these two forms of teacher culture can be clearly separated in a school. Each of the descriptors will be examined against data gathered from the case school to build an argument for recognition that elements of both cultures, as Hargreaves describes them, can co-exist in primary schools. More importantly, some degree of collaborative work, often contrived, inevitably exists in primary schools today.

The research

The research was conducted using the interpretive tradition. It took the form of an ethnographic case-study in a middle-sized, systemic primary school in an urban region. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate for an intense study of the relationships of members of an organisation, in essence the teacher culture of a school. It would allow for the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the working lives of the staff and the professional and social relationships that they form with one another.

Although it was intended that the case-study school be a fairly typical example of a systemic primary school, three specific criteria were used to select the school. The first was that the school could be identified as one with reasonably healthy staff relationships. There did not seem to be any value in studying collegial relationships in a school known to exhibit a climate of animosity amongst staff members. Second, both the principal and the teachers should have an interest in collegiality and collaboration. A school staff with an interest in their working relationships would be more willing to discuss them, and more open to having a researcher in their midst over a long period of time. Third, the school should have a full time professional staff from around 12 to 20. Nias, Southworth and Yeomans (1989) has already done a study of staff relationships in selected schools in the UK, but their cases were largely early years schools with small teaching staffs, all less than a full time equivalent of ten. Investigating staff relationships in a school with a larger number of staff would add a new dimension to the study and provide a more typical example of an urban Australian primary school.

The school eventually chosen for the case study had a full time professional staff of 16, including a non-teaching principal, and a full time equivalent of 18.6 members, made up from another six part-time teachers, most being teaching specialists. The average age was 44.3 years, average number of years full time teaching experience estimated at around 16 years and average time employed at the case study school 6.7 years. Females outnumbered males at a ratio of 9:2. Enrolment at the school was fairly stable at around 380 pupils. There were fourteen classes in total, two streams of every year level.

Data were collected over a period of one school year. They were gathered largely in the form of interviews and observation notes. The researcher, acting as a participant observer, visited the school regularly throughout the year, on average about one day a week. Eighteen staff members were interviewed during that time, the principal and assistant principal being interviewed on more than one occasion. Interview transcripts were returned to participants for comment and clearance.

The researcher initially worked in the school on a voluntarily basis one day a week, teaching full classes or individual students, doing office work and assisting in the library. In the second half of the school year she also did some paid relief teaching work. During the course of the year she attended staff meetings and pupil-free days, inservices, assemblies
and social activities, and generally participated fully in the life of the school. A wealth of rich data on staff relationships was collected over the year, some of which is presented in the findings below.

For a researcher who is an experienced teacher, perhaps one of the greatest difficulties in attempting to conduct research in a school environment is the need to "make the familiar strange", a notion put forward by Delamont and Atkinson (1995, p. 3). Fortunately, this piece of research was not based on observation of classroom practices but on staff relationships, for which the researcher was required to join an unfamiliar, adult group, both as a participant and an observer. It would be foolish to expect that a researcher could remain completely distant or detached under these circumstances. Indeed, it could be a testimony to the strength and health of staff relationships in the case-study school that the researcher fairly rapidly became an ‘insider’. The advantage of this ‘insider’ status is that research participants behave very naturally around someone they perceive as an insider. Thus a researcher may observe interactions displayed without reservation by participants. The challenge to the ‘insider’ status is then to be able to keep an open mind about what is observed, and to be able to interpret and report the findings non-defensively to the larger educational community.

Findings

As indicated above, this paper concentrates on a discussion of two of Hargreaves’ (1994) forms of teacher culture, ‘contrived collegiality’ and ‘collaborative culture’. In light of the data gathered at the case-study school, it debates the rigidity of the definitions of these forms of teacher culture. However, before doing this, it is valuable to identify exactly what work teachers do together with their colleagues. In trying to elucidate teachers’ collaborative work, it is important to understand that there are no clear-cut lines of definition. The range of teachers’ work is vast and evolving, not neatly compartmentalised for dissection by researchers. However, some loose categories have been nominated for discussion in this paper.

Fairly typical of many primary schools are the following collaborative teacher activities carried out routinely in the case-study school: staff meeting participation, curriculum development, policy development, school-based professional development, year-level planning, planning with specialists, subject coordinator or ‘key teacher’ duties and informal work-related gatherings. This, of course, only broadly outlines the professional activities conducted jointly by staff. Examination of a teacher culture cannot totally dismiss the social components, but these are not included in Hargreaves’ (1994) discussion of teacher cultures and therefore will not be considered in this paper. Each of these collaborative practices is discussed below, with particular attention being paid to who is involved in the activity, the consistency of participation in this activity across the staff, and how it matches with Hargreaves’ characteristics of the two nominated teacher cultures.

The most obvious example of teacher collaboration is at staff meetings. These were held after school once a fortnight. All full time staff members were expected to attend staff meetings, which were conducted in the staffroom. Two part-time staff members also regularly attend the meetings, bringing group size to a maximum of 18 people. The principal felt very strongly that the crux of collegiality was teamwork, and that meant giving teachers a share in the decision-making processes of the school.

I have never worked any other way than in that framework of bringing everyone together, working as a team. It takes endless patience. It takes endless time. There’s a certain amount of trust and care and listening and all of those sorts of skills. Sometimes it would be really easy to say, "We are
doing it this way and that’s that!" … But if ever I’ve gone in and made a decision without any consultation whatsoever, it never works. And you learn that it just doesn’t work. I won’t even buy a set of reading books without consultation and collaboration on it. (Principal)

Observation revealed that the teachers, during regular staff meetings, made many important decisions affecting their work. However, by Hargreaves’ (1994) standards, the collaborative work at staff meetings cannot fulfill the requirements of a collaborative culture, given that it is not spontaneous, voluntary, development oriented or pervasive across time or space. One could claim that the outcome is predictable in that decisions are made, but they are not necessarily administratively controlled outcomes, since the principal did not dictate the outcome of decisions in the case-study school.

In the case-study school, curriculum development involved all staff members. System administrators mandated school-based curriculum development. The school’s cycle of school-based curriculum development was linked to the regular production of new curricula by the central office.

With regard to the new curriculum coming in, it’s a good opportunity for everyone to have their say. Because it’s school-based I think it’s important, because everyone is affected. So if you’ve had your two cents worth then at least you’d think, "Well, I’m part of it." (Assistant Principal)

In the case-study school the process used required teachers across all grades to work with the key teacher of the particular subject under review in developing a curriculum suitable for the school.

I’ve done up a skills list, after talking with people from other schools about what they’re doing. And that will go to the staff to change, because a lot of it is just what I think, and that doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s right. So then we’ll sit down and sort it out, and change things, and then hopefully come up with something we can use. (Key teacher)

During the year of data collection, the Science curriculum was one learning area up for review and under the guidance of the key teacher for Science, teachers periodically met as a whole staff to discuss how the newly issued curriculum guidelines could be developed for their school. According to Hargreaves’ (1994) characteristics, this process of curriculum development would be classified as part of a culture of contrived collegiality, meeting all five characteristics of administrative control.

The process of formal policy development used in the case-study school operated in much the same way as curriculum development. All teachers are involved in developing policies related to their work with students. The last major policy to be developed at the school had been a Behaviour Management Policy, for which teachers had met regularly to provide input into the production of the final document. It is important to note here that this particular policy had been developed at the request of the teachers, not school administrators. Perhaps in this sense it defies some of Hargreaves’ (1994) characteristics of contrived collegiality, but the process of policy development used in the school is formal and administratively imposed, since all teachers must be involved. The administrative team of the school believes that everyone must have input into the policy development process of the school, and this in itself prevents administrators developing policies without ultimately negotiating with the full staff group.
I think that they [the teachers] have a big say in what goes on. And I think that's important as well. …[The principal] and I don't have all the wisdom. And it sits very well with what I believe – "Let’s all work together. Together we can move mountains." Individually you’re not going to move much at all, so let’s get everyone on board and let everyone have an input and a say. (Assistant Principal)

School-based professional development is another example of collaborative work that Hargreaves’ (1994) narrow definition would necessarily suggest belongs to a culture of contrived collegiality. These inservices require the attendance of all teachers at a specific time and place for the specific purpose of informing and improving an aspect of teaching and learning in a particular area of the primary curriculum. Key teachers usually organised the inservice sessions, topics mostly being selected in consultation with teachers and the administrative team.

When the computers started to kick off with the CLIC inservices [Computer Literacy Inservice Courses], I had to initiate, it is impossible to claim this type of activity as belonging to a collaborative culture.

Teachers in the case-study school were encouraged to do year-level planning in combination. Because there were two streams of every year level, there was an expectation in the school that a pair of teachers, frequently called ‘co-teachers’, would plan units of work in key areas together for their year level.

…[The principal] likes us [co-teachers] to do some work together. She does like us to work as a team in some way. I think she’s made it quite plain that she doesn’t want people to be isolated in their classrooms. (Teacher)

Some time was allocated to teachers for year-level planning during pupil-free days, particularly at the beginning of the school year. However, most of the year-level work was not mandated by administration and was not supported with release time or other resources. As is the case in many primary schools, parallel release time for all co-teachers could not be provided. While it was strongly encouraged by the principal, there were no real controls or checks put upon collaborative year-level planning. In this regard, most collaborative work at the year-level would fit Hargreaves’ (1994) description of a collaborative culture.

Collaboration has to come from within. Nobody can do it for them [teachers]. They have to want to be collaborative. They have to want to do the planning together. They have to accept that responsibility for working with another person. (Principal)

Nothing says that as a teacher you have to teach with someone else. That’s your own prerogative. (Teacher)

It is interesting to note, however, that across the school the collegial practice of year-level planning was not consistent. This provides further indication that it is not administratively controlled, even though the principal stated that she put some thought into matching co-teachers each year. The administrative team acknowledged that not all year-level partnerships worked totally successfully, but emphasised that teachers were individuals and difference was accepted, even welcomed, within the staff group. They did not see that staff morale or children’s education suffered because all teachers did not work equally well in collaborative situations.
I think it’s important, and …[the principal] does as well, that you’re got to allow people to use their talents in the best possible way. So okay, not everyone is as happy or as comfortable working closely. … It’s not affecting staff morale. It’s not affecting the curriculum [teaching and learning] that’s going on. So as long as that’s happening, I’m quite comfortable with the fact that people can be their own people. (Assistant Principal)

Besides the small amount of time allocated on pupil-free days, all pairs of teachers did some work together in planning their units in their own time and of their own free will, and all teachers shared many resources across the year level.

At the beginning of each term, or at the end of the previous term … we [self and co-teacher] plan for the following term, what we’re going to do in each area and what resources we’ll need, that sort of thing, and divide out who’s going to do what. (Teacher)

I think the people that don’t plan together probably are the exception. Because I think the others realise the benefits. (Teacher)

However, the closeness of the partnerships varied greatly. Interviews with teachers revealed that many teachers both enjoyed and benefited from working with their co-teachers and would choose to do this regardless of any encouragement from the principal. Some teachers were very satisfied with their partnerships, but a smaller number felt that their partnerships were not as successful as they would like them to be.

The other teacher [last year’s co-teacher], we would work together all the time. We would be continually, every afternoon, talking. … And it would just be constant. We’d share. We shared the workload. …[Present co-teacher] just doesn’t want to work that way, so it just means now that it’s another way of working. (Teacher)

These teachers, who wanted a closer collaborative relationship with their co-teachers, felt limited by the interest of their co-teacher, that is, they felt constrained because their co-teachers did not want to work more closely.

In the same way, the extent to which teachers, either individually or with their co-teachers, worked with specialist teachers varied across the school. In particular, most teachers planned with the teacher librarian and the technology teacher, since these specialist teachers took lessons for which class teachers remained present in the specialist’s room with their students. To some extent these lessons could be team-taught, and the class teachers frequently negotiated with the specialists as to how special skills in library or technology areas could be integrated into classroom activities.

My work with other teachers, the majority of it, I would plan with them. Some of it is just impromptu … because I’m just basically supporting them. With a number of teachers, though, it is actually a planned unit that we plan together and then we teach together. (Teacher Librarian)

Little or no planning was done with specialists in Music, HPE or LOTE. A factor influencing this may be that class teachers were released for these specialist lessons. Some teachers spent time planning with the learning support teacher for the benefit of individual students, but the extent to which this happened varied also.
Towards the end of each term I usually know what I’m going to do the following term so I will talk to …[the teacher librarian] about it. We will discuss what we want to do in the library. I probably don’t work as much with …[the learning support teacher], although I would quite often just speak to her on the run about some concerns that I would have about certain little groups of children. (Teacher)

While there was no mandate that class teachers should plan with any specialist teachers, or vice versa, and no release time was provided for this activity, it is obvious that many worked collaboratively in this way, presumably because they felt it would benefit their students. Therefore, a collaborative culture according to Hargreaves’ (1994) characteristics could be presumed.

Perhaps one of the most obvious examples of voluntary collaborative work comes to light when observing the work of ‘key teachers’ (subject coordinators) in the case-study school. At the time of data collection the school had seven key teachers, each of whom had responsibility for one key learning area or subject. None of these was a paid position of responsibility. Every teacher who held such a position had volunteered for the position, and for some the extra burden of work related to that teaching area was considerable. The amount of work in each key learning area varied, depending on the profile of that subject in any particular year. However, HPE and Technology were particularly demanding areas, as were the core subjects of Mathematics and English. Both SOSE and Science key teachers undertook significant curriculum development activities during the year, so their profiles were also raised during the period of data collection.

Key teachers in the case-study school have no duty statements. Some key teachers coordinated activities for inservice days, either for professional development purposes or in the course of developing curriculum.

As a key teacher I will be developing units of work with the teachers in each year level, developing whole school programs in my subject area. It will involve a lot of liaison with not just teachers from our school, but other schools as well, and other key teachers. (Key teacher)

At staff meetings key teachers also presented reports and gathered information that was used to make whole group decisions on implementing programs in their subject areas. Key teachers of core teaching areas also assisted individuals or pairs of teachers with unit planning if requested.

I go to the key teachers for resources and advice in their subject areas. Like earlier this year I was talking to …[key teacher]. We did some [in service] work as a staff and then afterwards I said to her, "Look, this isn't working. I'm looking for something like this." And she went back to her [curriculum] people and we got some resources. (Teacher)

While it could be implied that the organisational structure that created key teacher roles was administratively contrived, it is difficult to say that the collegial work that ultimately resulted was also so contrived. The extent to which key teachers interacted professionally with their colleagues in the course of their specific duties could only be dependent on the enthusiasm and dedication of the holders of those positions.

A significant example of Hargreaves’ (1994) collaborative culture exists in the informal gatherings of teachers. Truly spontaneous, voluntary, development oriented, unpredictable
and pervasive of time and space are the many occasions during any week when teachers will gather to ‘talk shop’.

I think teachers are very good at using and picking other people’s brains and ideas and resources. As long as people don’t get too protective of what they have. That causes a problem. (Teacher)

Even dismissing the frequent focus on aberrant student behaviour and what Little (1982, p. 329) called the "swapping of classroom war stories", teachers spend a great deal of time talking professionally.

I ask other teachers [for help to improve my teaching]. Now …[teacher], I think she keeps up with the educational philosophies that are happening at this time, and she does a lot of background reading, I know. So I can draw on her for that. (Teacher)

For a particular teacher its purpose may be to gain advice on a teaching issue or an appropriate resource. For another it may be the desire to share a good idea. Frequently, it is to discuss and share with other professional people the experiences of the job. This cannot be undervalued as a collegial practice, especially the emotional benefits to be gained from interacting with colleagues at this level.

What becomes very obvious is that it is difficult to define the collegial culture at the case-study school using Hargreaves’ (1994) descriptors. Different collaborative activities carried out by teachers in the normal course of the school year all contribute to defining the culture of a school. It is difficult to designate the school as belonging to either contrived collegiality or a collaborative culture under these circumstances. Clearly, there is a need to reconceptualise collegiality as it is operates in primary schools.

**Discussion of findings**

In the section above, various components of teachers collaborative work was compared with the characteristics of contrived collegiality or collaborative culture as formulated by Hargreaves (1994). This section considers in more detail why these elements of teachers’ work have developed into collaborative activities, moving away from the tradition of isolation which has long been the pattern of teachers’ work.

At the heart of this paper is a proposition that there is now an element of collaboration built into the work of all primary teachers. Teachers in primary schools in Australia today are unable to avoid some degree of cooperative work with their colleagues. Naturally, this proposition is an extension of case study research, but it is also based on the author’s considerable experience in schools. Given the advances in school-based management in government schools, and the increased focus on participatory or shared leadership in schools in general, it is hard to conceive of a situation where teachers are totally isolated from their colleagues.

One way of analysing teachers’ collaborative work is to consider the compulsory aspect. Both teachers and administrators can readily categorise various types of collaborative work as either compulsory or non-compulsory. In the case-study school teachers were unable to avoid collaborating with their peers in the areas of curriculum development, school-based professional development activities, policy creation and in their involvement in general operations of the school through decision-making at staff meetings. Participation in such collaborative activities was compulsory for these teachers because it was considered by the school’s administrative team to be part and parcel of every teacher’s job. According to
researchers like Hargreaves (1994) and Smyth (1991), this would constitute control over teachers’ work, and from a solely micro-political perspective that is understandable.

However, three important points must also be considered: the democratic, ethical and practical issues associated with collaborative work. It is difficult to consider a more democratic way of working in a school. The fact that teachers have a role to play in the decision-making process of the school, be it in curriculum and policy development or the general operations of the school, suggests that democratic principles are important in the case-study school. The notion of collegiality as a broad democratic practice has recently been put forward by Fielding (1999).

Equally, a case is made for an ethical dimension to teacher collegiality.

Indeed the case for consensual decision making is at the heart of one of the central arguments in favour of collegiality, the notion that it is ethically right in ways which bureaucratic management styles could never claim to be. Collegiality contains within it a moral dimension … (Brundrett, 1998, p. 308)

Even though they are compulsory, these collaborative practices provide the opportunity for joint, consensual decision-making such that those who have a stake in the issues have the chance to become involved in the debate and the final decision. This is an ethical, valid justification for these types of collaborative work.

Being even more pragmatic, there is the practical aspect of such work to be considered. It makes sense that activities such as curriculum development, policy creation and school-based professional development be done collaboratively. Besides the fact that they impact on the whole school community and have the capacity to critically affect student learning across the grades, it is hard to conceive how or why each teacher should do them on an individual basis. These activities are therefore necessarily collaborative because there are pragmatic reasons for operating in this way within the school.

Besides the compulsory collaborative work outlined above, it is clearly evident that teachers collaborate with their colleagues on other activities for which there is no external pressure to do so. In the case study school many teachers jointly worked on classroom planning and programming, accepted key teacher positions and their attendant duties, gathered informally for professional discussions and collaborated with specialist teachers, even in some cases team teaching with them. Little, if any, administrative support was provided for these activities by way of release time or other resources. The inability to be able to provide parallel release time for teachers is not unique to the case-study school, but is largely the result of a fairly traditional primary school teaching structure and limited funding for teaching personnel additional to that established structure. However, despite the lack of this type of support, many teachers willingly collaborated on such activities. A desire to work in this way must have some associated benefits for teachers.

This research clearly reveals that from a teacher’s perspective working collaboratively saves teachers time and inspires better teaching. Teachers believe that collaborating with specialist teachers and year-level teachers improves the quality of teaching practice by creating better ideas for and about teaching, but sharing the load in writing units and planning programs also saves valuable time. The desire of teachers to work collaboratively is closely related to the intensification of teachers’ work. With more demands being put upon teachers’ time, many look for more creative ways to handle traditional teacher tasks such as term planning and unit development. The benefits that teachers obtain from shared work, in particular by gaining better quality ideas in less time and sharing the planning load, is likely to encourage them to continue the practice.
The notion of habit can then be considered. The custom of collaborating with colleagues in administratively controlled situations may itself cause a spill-over to year-level planning and other less formal collaborative practices. The habit of collaborating may become more institutionalised as the practice is repeated, provided the experience is a positive one. Once commenced in a more contrived fashion, teachers may see other benefits of working together and become less averse to the practice, to the extent that some no longer want to work in a more isolated fashion as was the previous custom.

Given that there is an element of collaboration, compulsory or otherwise, now attached to all primary teachers’ work, an acceptable extension of this notion is that the level of collaboration will not be consistent. It certainly does not appear to be consistent amongst teachers in the case-study school. If the collaborative work is generated in part by teachers themselves because they choose to work in this fashion, then this is understandable. As was observed in the case-study school, teachers differ in their desire to work collegially for a myriad of reasons.

Conclusion

In supporting the proposition that there is an element of collaboration built into the work of all primary teachers, it is important to consider why collaboration is becoming so widespread in primary schools. Without doubt, the spread of collaboration is due in part to the increasingly expanded nature of teachers’ work. Teachers are no longer able to close themselves off from colleagues because of the added requirement that they become involved in the development of school-based curriculum and professional development activities, as well as more fully responsible for decision-making within the school.

Within the case-study school, there appeared to be a minimum level of collaboration at which all teachers participated. It is posited that this minimum level of collaborative work may be maintained through administrative control, that is, school leaders make it compulsory that all teachers work collaboratively on certain tasks. Any collaboration above the minimum level could then be attributed to individual choice. Teachers frequently choose to work with their colleagues on non-compulsory tasks because not only does it inspire their teaching but it also reduces their workload. The desire by some teachers to work more closely with colleagues for mutual benefit accounts for the variation in collaborative practice within the school.

As Hargreaves (1994) suggests, genuine collaboration arises from teachers themselves as a social group. Collaboration must necessarily be seen as both enjoyable and rewarding for teachers, otherwise the practice would not continue. Therefore, the state of staff relationships becomes very important as a foundation for genuine collaboration in primary schools. Collegiality as a way of working needs to be based on healthy staff relationships. It is posited that if teachers feel themselves to be part of a cohesive, caring group, they are much more likely to develop genuine collaborative practices than if this is not the case. A spirit of care and consideration for colleagues, and a genuine desire to share knowledge, resources and time in a non-competitive environment all contribute to positive staff relationships upon which more successful collaborative practices can ultimately be based.

In re-appraising the notion of collegiality in the primary school it is important to understand that the range of teachers’ work is not rigid or immobile. It is difficult to capture a picture of separate categories of teachers’ work because different tasks all feed into the larger picture of teaching as a social activity. Likewise, and because of this, it is difficult to separate staff relationships into neat, static professional categories. The intellectual, social and emotional aspects of staff relationships are intricately linked to one another and merge into a pattern of interactions played out daily by teachers in the course of their work.
In summary, this paper has shown that teacher collegiality is a poorly defined concept that generally describes the aspect of teachers' work that brings them into close contact with their colleagues. Collaborative practices are becoming more widespread in primary schools than was once considered the case, due in part to the intensification of teachers' work. Certainly, this paper details a proposition that there is an element of collaboration in the work of all primary teachers today. It is acknowledged that some of this collaboration is administratively controlled. However, this does not prohibit some teachers forming genuine collaborative relationships because they see them as rewarding and enjoyable. In fact, teacher collaboration may even be habit forming, born out of its more controlled forms. In this way, collegiality is an enigmatic notion within a school, being made up of elements of both administratively controlled and teacher generated collaborative relationships.

Teachers' work continues to be variable and complex, and thus cannot neatly be categorised by types of peer relationships. Rather, many diverse interactions with peers make up the daily labour of teaching. Healthy staff relationships therefore are central to the prosperity of teachers' working lives. Healthy relationships amongst colleagues improve the chances of teachers forming collaborative relationships. Genuine teacher collaboration is built upon positive professional and social relationships, regardless of the support or control provided by school leaders.
References


