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# Teacher Perceptions of Collaborative Practices in a Rural High School Setting: Case Study

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# Teacher Perceptions of Collaborative Practices in a Rural High School Setting: Case Study

By

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# Dedication

To my husband and best friend, Jason Slimp. God blessed me with a man who is patient, kind, loving, and supportive. Without your words of encouragement, I would not have completed a lifelong dream. Thank you for being you and motivating me for all these years. I love you!

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## Abstract

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to investigate how teachers in a rural high school setting perceived collaborative practices. The case study examined and analyzed the outcomes of teachers' learning through a personal connection to professional growth through weekly collaborative planning meetings and professional learning communities. Four collaborative groups of SPED and general education teachers from Geometry, 9th Grade Literature, and Biology, and U.S. History within Rural High School originally were asked to participate in the study. The study concluded with participants in the content areas from Geometry, 9th Grade Literature, and Biology. A total of eleven teachers served as participants in the study. Interviews, observations, and a focus group were the data collection instruments that connected and answered the three research questions related to the study.


*Keywords:* collaborative practices, collaboration, professional learning communities, adult learning theories

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# Chapter One

## Teacher Perceptions of Collaborative Practices in a Rural High School Setting: Case Study

With the many facets of a high school master schedule, manipulation of the schedule to allow time for planning and collaboration may be difficult. Casillas (2018) believes that a school's schedule has many purposes other than instruction. Pisoni & Conti (2019) explains that operational decisions are necessary for high-quality instruction by scheduling collaboration, planning and professional development. The roles of collaboration and content alignment are directly related to text and resource selection (Lynch, 2012). Hibbeln (2020) states that "master scheduling is the greatest tool in our belt for aligning structure, instruction, and culture" (p. 38). This study presented the problem of practice at Rural High School (RHS), a pseudonym for a Rural School District in Georgia, to analyze how teachers' perceptions of collaboration are affected when dedicated time and structures are introduced. A qualitative case study examined my high school's master schedule and the impact this change had on teacher collaboration.

### Personal connection with the research topic

I began to think about the strengths of our teachers and staff to determine where they best fit in the day-to-day operation of the school. Although I am not an expert in all content areas in a high school setting, I understand instructional practices and the importance of collaboration among shared content area teachers and special education teachers. I have often wondered if teachers would be more motivated to work collaboratively or participate in professional learning if they were given a choice of content or courses rather than assigned content. In addition, as a leader in our building, I believe a personal connection with our faculty and staff can lead to a positive working environment and more active teacher involvement within departments.

When I started my doctorate, I was interested in how redesigning a high school master schedule would impact student performance. Then, my interest shifted to understanding the teacher perceptions of collaboration following a redesign of the master schedule. The previous master schedule at my high school did not provide the proper structure for success on a block schedule. For example, students had no limitations on the number of academic courses they could take per semester. Upon discovering the lack of consistency and balance of rigor in students' schedules for academic classes, I decided to investigate the teacher aspect of the master schedule. After many informal classroom observations and discussions with teachers, I discovered that redesigning our master schedule would benefit all teachers by incorporating common planning between SPED and content area teachers. I presumed that a change in the master schedule would result in a positive outcome if teachers indulged in effective uses of common planning, a well-developed professional learning plan and were given proper consideration of personal preference of the content taught.

The relationship between macro and micro socio-political circumstances in developing a collaborative process was determined through multiple conversations, observations, and a strategically designed schedule that would impact teachers and students. The micro-level initiated one-on-one interactions with educators to establish trust, learned individual needs from a teaching perspective, and determined resources to develop effective professional learning needs. At the macro level, the master schedule could be viewed as a giant puzzle with multiple dimensions pieced together for the right fit for the school to become structured and prosperous through collaboration.

**Problem Statement**

As an assistant principal, my roles and responsibilities include curriculum, professional development, and overseeing the master schedule. After reviewing the previous master schedule, I discovered no evidence of dedicated time for collaboration between special education and general education teachers. The previous master schedule at my high school did not support collaborative planning and was not designed for SPED teachers to work with their assigned academic teacher. The redesigned master schedule to improve teacher learning through collaboration is essential for many reasons. Hibbeln (2020) explains how a “master schedule can change the way the school interacts, and it is an opportunity for a school to radically change what students learn, how teachers teach, and the outcomes schools produce" (p.40). Lynch (2012) believes the school leader must collaborate with stakeholders (p.20). Collaboration must occur among all stakeholders: the principal, the teachers, the parents, and the students. I was interested in teacher growth and effectiveness results when a revised schedule, which reflected SPED and general education teachers' preferences, was utilized in teaching assignments. Additionally, I wanted to understand teacher perceptions on improving instruction through collaborative planning and how the opportunity to collaborate impacted their professional growth.

**Research Questions**

1. What are SPED and general education teacher perceptions of collaboration at Rural High School?
2. How does the implementation of standard collaborative practices influence teacher collaboration?
3. According to teachers, how have their classroom instructional practices changed as a result of focused collaboration efforts?

**Definitions**

*Collaboration*: refers to people working together toward common goals (Solone et al., 2020).

*Professional Learning Communities*: collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals for which members are mutually accountable (DuFour, 2010).

*Instructional Practices*: research-based instructional practices (GADOE, 2018).

*Instructional Leadership*: leaders who work closely with students developing teaching techniques and methods to understand teacher perspectives and establish a base on which to make curricular decisions (Jenkins, 2009).

**Conceptual Framework**

This study's conceptual framework (Figure 1) was based on Ravitch & Riggan's (2017) approach to building conceptual frameworks to support a given research topic's relevance and the need to study it properly. Personal interests and goals, identity and positionality, topical research, and theoretical frameworks fit within the substructure (Figure 2: Teacher Perceptions Conceptual Framework). At the same time, the literature review serves as a primary process through which these elements are forged into a cogent, persuasive argument" (Ravitch & Riggans, 2017, p.9). I was personally connected to this qualitative case study by developing the collaborative process and fledgling professional relationships between SPED and general education teachers due to a redesigned master schedule that established common planning times for collaboration. Over the years, the term "collaboration" among teachers in our building has negatively impacted their perceptions of planning time. Teachers often feel that collaborative time is spent on creating tests and benchmarks rather than developing engaging lessons (M. Fields, personal communication, March 3, 2020).

Two theoretical frameworks guided my research: adult learning theory and leadership theory. These theories focused on adult learning patterns and how adult learners constructed their understanding of experiences. My topical research focused on instructional leader roles in promoting collaboration, collaborative structures, and professional learning.

The perspectives of changing teacher practices through increased collaboration between SPED and general education was a primary focus of this study. The qualitative case study established a new collaborative planning process to improve teacher learning through common practices and professional learning. Data was collected through interviews, a focus group, and observations. Mathematics, ELA, Science, and Social Studies teachers were asked to participant in the focus group, as well as SPED teachers assigned to these content area teachers.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017)*

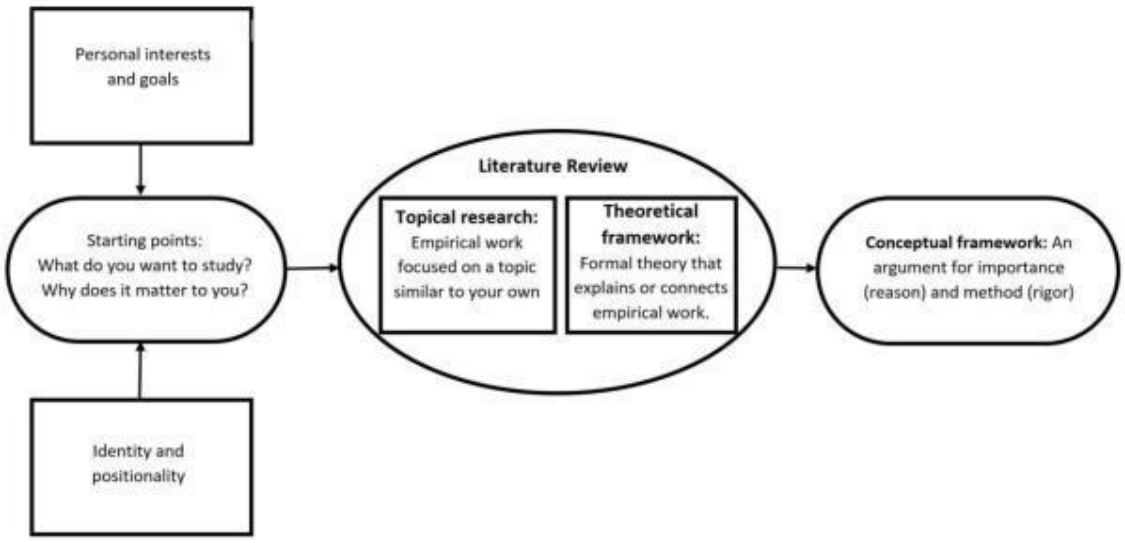
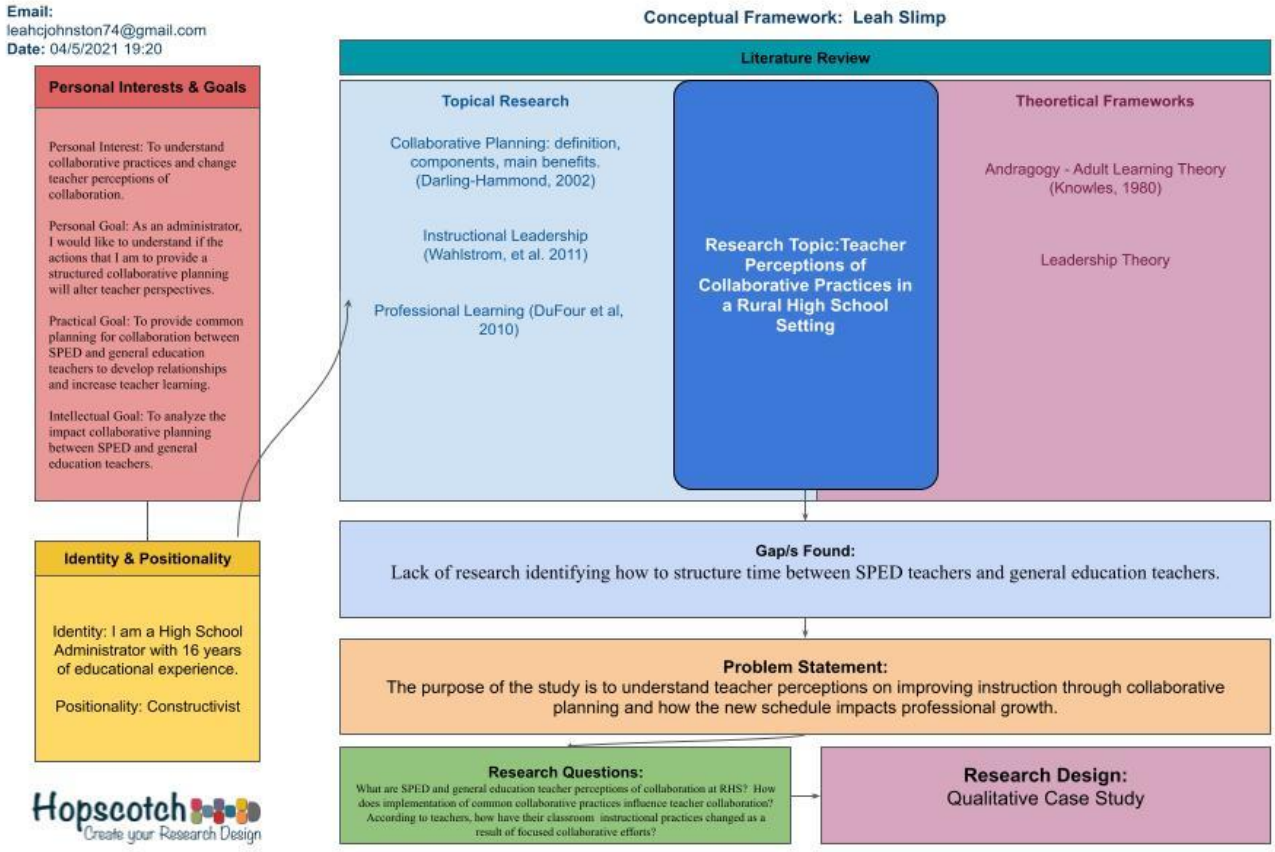


**Figure 2**

*Teacher Perceptions Conceptual Framework (Jorrin-Abellan, 2019)*




## Limitations of the study

In my experience, high school teachers are generally reclusive. I was concerned I might face opposition from general education teachers and SPED teachers who might be unwilling to participate in the study or opposed to restructuring the master schedule when assigned new planning blocks and courses. Additionally, the structured PLCs required me to model effective practices and build a positive culture that required teachers to participate and utilize the protocols in collaborative planning. As a result, some teachers implemented the collaborative planning process to improve their instructional practices. This was challenging for many teachers who were not consistent in practices and did not understand the importance of collaboration.

Trust is a key factor for effective PLCs to be successful throughout the school (Hallam et al., 2015). However, I believed a change in school culture and mindset would result as teacher input was incorporated into the design of the new master schedule. When teachers have a voice, are acknowledged, and feel as if their input matters, everyone becomes more involved in the success of a school. Dana and Yendol-Silva (2003) stated, “This stance becomes professional positioning, owned by the teacher, where questioning one's practice becomes part of the teacher's work and, eventually, part of the teaching culture (p. 261). I was optimistic that the allotted common planning time for general education and SPED teachers would lead them to a new and improved instructional mindset and redefined their perspectives of collaboration and the impact this collaborative process would have on teachers perceptions.

**Historical Context**

Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) found that a school’s schedule often places limitations on teachers’ time to work with others in collaborative practices such as lesson planning, assessment development, etc. Dewey, in Vygotsky (2021), contributed learning ideas to develop a constructivist viewpoint on education. Lamon (2021) shares that Dewey contributed the concept of real-world problems to the curriculum, while Vygotsky linked learning and development to social interactions. Constructivist learning environments aim to “provide rich experiences that encourage students to learn” (Schunk, 2012, p. 261). Lynch (2012) reminds us that constructivist theory should be viewed as whether or not the knowledge works rather than it is “true or false” ( p.167).

Dewey (1916) wrote, "thinking is the method of intelligent learning, of learning that employs and rewards minds” (pg. 265). “Vygotsky's sociocultural theory views human development as a socially mediated process in which children acquire cultural values, beliefs,

and problem-solving strategies through collaborative dialogues with more knowledgeable members of society" (McLeod, 2020). We, therefore, find the "constructivist learning attaches as much meaning to the process of learning as it does to the acquisition of new knowledge" (Lynch, 2012, pg. 170). Brau (2018) suggested that the learner should consider past experiences, personal views, and cultural backgrounds to interpret the information being taught. He continues by sharing his belief that one learns best through interacting with others. According to Lynch (2012), the constructivist should approach learning as a facilitator because learners' possess individual experiences within learning. Schunk (2012) suggested that instructional methods that work well with constructivism include discovery learning, inquiry teaching, peer-assisted learning, discussions and debates, and reflective teaching. This study provided teachers with opportunities to work collaboratively with their colleagues to focus on improving instructional practices.

Honebein (1996) summarized the seven pedagogical goals of constructivist learning environments:

> (a) to provide experience with the knowledge construction process (students determine how they will learn); (b) to provide experience in and appreciation for multiple perspectives (evaluation of alternative solutions); (c) to embed learning in realistic contexts (authentic tasks); (d) to encourage ownership and a voice in the learning process (student-centered learning); (e) to embed learning in social experience (collaboration); (f) to encourage the use of multiple modes of representation, (video, audio text, etc.); (g) to encourage awareness of the knowledge construction process (reflection, metacognition).

Lynch (2012) tells us that there is a need for a shift in perspectives for teachers and school leaders. The shift must move from "people who teach" to "facilitators of learning" (p.170). Professional learning must be deliberate for teachers to learn how to engage with colleagues through dialogue and challenge negative collaboration perspectives. Teachers should have opportunities to learn and share ideas and personal experiences actively. As professionals, teachers have a plethora of knowledge and experiences to share during the collaborative planning sessions. Teachers benefit from the collaborative process by learning strategies to enhance the content and promote a student-centered learning environment.

**Benefits of Collaboration**

Collaboration not only provides an opportunity to share ideas and strategies for teachers, but it also allows individuals to promote change that extends beyond the classroom (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). This includes providing opportunities for students to benefit from the change. Killion (2015) found that high-quality collaboration amongst teachers can increase student achievement and individual performance. Solone et al. (2020) reveal that “collaboration is a commitment to a culture of mutual respect and trust, ultimately catalyzing optimal student outcomes” (p.284).

Kelly (n.d.) tells us that if "managed correctly, collaboration is a powerful tool that can allow educators to tap into new ideas and information; it allows for challenge and differentiation, enhanced confidence and self-esteem, and strengthened social skills.” In addition, collaboration is an avenue by which teachers can explore different ways to reach students (Poulos et al., 2014).

**Challenges of Collaboration**

Darling-Hammond's (2009) research indicates that, while some collaboration occurs, it also tends to be ineffective. Minimal consideration is given to curriculum design or effective instructional practices. Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) continue with “key findings in the research which reveals that American teachers spend more time teaching students, and have less time to plan and learn together, and to develop high-quality curriculum and instruction in contrast to teachers in other nations (80% of working time and 60% of planning time” (p. 15). Collaborative planning began due to a master schedule designed to promote teacher collaboration.

When redesigning a master schedule to optimize time and improve instructional practices, there are many components to consider. A well-developed schedule is often overlooked as a key element to school improvement (Canady & Rettig, 1995). The master schedule should be designed to address two aspects of instruction: 1) identification of student academic needs and 2) how teachers will improve instruction. Additionally, the scheduling process takes time when using a strategic approach. By using a strategic approach, more attention can be devoted to the overall design and direction of the organization (Lynch, 2012). A range of needs, including social, emotional, and behavioral, can be met through being intentional when designing staff schedules (Levenson, 2018). Collaboration is designed for teachers to improve instructional practices, to impact student learning, and, as a result, positive outcomes are produced.

To optimize a master schedule, Casillas (2018) suggests engaging teachers and leaders in the process, examining student needs, and remaining focused on the school's vision. According to Hibbeln (2020), the schedule should not be about the schedule itself but what it can do for the

students. Improving instruction will benefit "struggling learners" and provide collaboration for teachers throughout the day (Hibbeln, 2020, p. 37). Although schools that move to a block schedule may be apprehensive, Shortt and Thayer (1999) proved that increased instruction time was available to students and individualized instruction benefited student needs. They continued by pointing out, "perhaps the greatest asset of block scheduling is the flexibility to use the time to meet the needs of at-risk students" (p.78). Research shows that block schedules have many benefits, including enhanced school climate, more collaborative learning and teaching practices, and opportunities for curriculum enhancement, to name a few. (Buchman et al., 1995; Fogarty, 1995; Salvaterra & Admas, 1995; Schoenstein, 1994; Shortt & Thayer, 1995 as cited in Weller & McLeskey, 2000). Rimpola (2014) recommends scheduled collaboration times in the master schedule for teachers to plan lessons and determine strategies to meet the needs of all students.

In further research from Canady and Rettig (1995), three problems were identified in improving school schedules: (a) providing quality time, (b) creating a school climate, (c) providing varying learning times. Canady and Rettig reiterate the need for a redesigned master schedule to reduce the failure rate within the special population. Weller and McLeskey (2020) explain how team teachers can benefit from examining current teaching practices and sharing the responsibility for modifying the curriculum.

**Summary**

Chapter one provided an introduction to the study, focusing on a personal connection with the research topic, problem statement, conceptual framework, and limitations of the study. Imperative terms were defined to provide a better understanding of the components of collaboration.

The following chapters are organized to explain the nature of the study thoroughly. Chapter two provides the literature review based on adult learning and leadership theory. The methodology of the study is provided in chapter three. Chapter four presents the findings, and chapter five summarizes the conclusion and recommendations.

# Chapter Two

## Literature Review

Research conducted for this study is organized by topical research and theoretical frameworks. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) defined topical research as work, most often empirical that has focused on the subject of interest (p.11). Ravitch and Riggan discuss how topical research would profoundly shape how researchers frame and conduct studies, help identify gaps in the literature review and survey the range of methodological approaches to the topic. The topical research focused on instructional leadership, collaborative structure, and professional learning communities. These authors define theoretical frameworks for how a researcher engages, integrates, and argues formal theories. Theoretical frameworks provided a structure in which to organize and connect the concepts found in topical research. For example, although a gap was found in the literature identifying how to structure time between SPED and general education teachers, my topical research guided my study in analyzing teacher collaboration perspectives. Teachers' learning activities can be continual, persistent, and focused on a specific issue or problem over time when professional development is embedded into their routines (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

### Instructional Leader Role in Promoting Collaboration

Instructional leadership plays a vital role in the overall structure of the school. Lynch (2018) determined that an effective principal builds trust and provides support to their faculty. Leaders who are supportive of teachers and students can build a positive culture, as well as provide structures and guidance to improve for student learning. Lambert (2002) defines leadership capacity as broad-based, skillful participation in the work of leadership (p.38). Additional features include vision, inquiry, collaboration, reflection, and student achievement to

create new tasks of shared instructional leadership. As a school's instructional leader, a principal is tasked with developing a learning community that supports staff and acknowledges their varied backgrounds and experiences (Watkins, 2005).

Washlstrom et al. (2011) found that effective leadership provides support, understands how others learn, puts structures in place, and establishes effective learning practices. Professional development becomes an enhanced "power of professional growth" (p.22). A variety of models, such as coaching, study group, and collaboration, are used by leaders to develop staff capacity and promote professional conversations between teachers (Blase & Blase, 2000). Supovitz et al. (2010) found that schools with improved instruction and learning outcomes are lead by principals who support collaboration and develop trust.

"Shared instructional leadership involves active collaboration of the principal and teachers on curriculum, instruction, and assessment" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 371). Ozdemir et al. (2020) found that in order to improve curriculum and school goals, an effective instructional leader facilitates teachers' work and promotes the active involvement of all stakeholders. Leaders who support teachers will build a positive culture and promote the quality of "teaching and learning" (Ozdemire et al., 2020, p. 26). For collaboration to be consistent, the principal should be visible, and engaged in conversation about collaboration throughout the school and community (Morris, 2007). Instructional leaders must promote active teaching by providing opportunities for others to discuss instructional practices with knowledge of content (Quinn, 2002).

Quinn (2002) explains how the "Principal's role as an instructional leader is to motivate and inspire teachers with the end goal of impacting instructional practice and ultimately increasing student achievement" (p. 447). Principals who create existing and reinforcing learning

environments will find that students and teachers want to do what needs to be done (Whitaker, 1997). Whitaker (1997) and Fiore (2000) suggest that principal visibility is key to effective leadership. Principal visibility can promote a positive culture in a building. Lynch (2012) states that to achieve sustainable school improvement, leaders need to focus more on instructional leadership by monitoring and assessing teacher performance, organizing and conducting mentoring and coaching sessions, nurturing teachers' professional development, and building teamwork and cooperative learning. Glickman et al. (2001) challenge supervisors to treat teachers as individual adult learners to use their potential.

Wiggins and Damore (2006) explain how communication, collaboration, and cooperation can improve performance. In agreement, Anrig (2015) finds that teachers and administrators must have a mutual respect for one other in order for schools to be effective. In addition to trust, Anrig explains that communication with parents, as well as dedicated time each week to improve instructional practices, are key factors to improving effectiveness.

## Collaborative Structure

Research reveals that teacher and leader collaboration is a significant part of student success (Mora-Ruano et al., 2019). Collaboration should be a part of the master schedule to increase the connection among departments, co-teachers, and students. Poulos et al. (2014) define effective collaboration as “engaging in regular routines where teachers communicate about classroom experiences to strengthen pedagogical expertise and push colleagues to try new things” (p. 8). According to Shakenova (2017), collaboration is defined as shared values through teacher learning which influences teaching practice and student achievement. For collaboration to be a common occurrence within the school, principals must establish expectations for collaboration (Morris, 2007). Teachers and school can improve through engaging in

collaborative conversations focused on developing and analyzing assessments, as well as identifying desired learning outcomes (DuFour et al., n.d.). Participants in this study were given weekly collaborative planning times to focus on developing assessments, instructional practices, analyzed student learning, and established working relationships to improve teacher learning.

Scheduling collaboration with content area teachers and co-teachers is tricky for schools to embed in a master schedule. According to Rimpola (2014), “collaboration does not occur by forming a group of two or more. Instead, however, it requires a professional commitment of both co-teachers to the process and a consistent focus on student needs, curriculum decisions, and planning teaching strategies” (p. 43).

Wiggins and Damore (2006) pointed out that discussion in adult collaboration focuses on "teacher and student success, leadership, school change, and institutional improvement" (p. 20). Raywid (1993) suggests schools take control of their programs to find collaboration time through individual teacher scheduling. Building the capacity of teachers to enhance their instructional practice and the capacity of school systems to foster teacher learning key to improving student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

Nelson et al. (2010) suggest experienced leaders using "collaborative norms, protocols, and group-generated sets of questions" to establish and develop starting points for shared meanings (p. 176). Darling-Hammond et al. (2014) found that when “productive working relationships are apparent among teachers, benefits can include greater consistency in instruction, willingness to share practices, try new ways of teaching, and more success in involving problems of practice” (p. 18).

When working together, leaders and teachers foster a culture of meaningful collaboration and continuous school improvement and engage in activities that improve student learning

opportunities (Poulos et al., 2014). Ripley (1997) says teams of teachers working in unison, and in partnership, are more effective instructors who focus on developing their practices centered around curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Experienced and knowledgeable teachers are keenly aware of students' prior knowledge and collaborate with their peers to establish a sequence of effective instructional strategies and lessons that address the needs of their students (Darling-Hammond, 2002).

Collaboration and improving instruction in a collegial environment to strive for high student achievement is possible for all teachers. When trust is created amongst a team, teacher empowerment becomes evident in decision-making and establishes a positive work environment. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2018) stated, "collaborative supervision is based on the belief that teaching is primarily problem solving," and "a supervisor's role is to guide the problem-solving process" (p. 106). Therefore, collaboration is a crucial component when defining school improvement. Ripley (1997) explains that collaboration's purpose is to meet the needs of all learners and share experience between team members.

Collaborative learning is defined by Laal and Ghodsi (2011) as an “educational approach to teaching and learning that involves groups of learners working together to solve a problem, complete a task, or create a product” (p. 486). For collaborative planning to be meaningful, teachers must make an effort to meet regularly to discuss and evaluate student progress and adjust teaching and learning (Ripley, 1997). Rimpola (2014) reveals that most of the learning agenda is established during the collaborative planning phase. This is why it is imperative that all members of a collaborative group be able to contribute to the agenda, goals, and outcomes of the collaborative process. “Constructivism teaches that change occurs by creating the right conditions for stakeholders to engage in dialogue and collaborative inquiry and developing the

capacity to use their ideas to create locally transformative solutions to problems" (Lynch, 2012, p. 178).

**Cooperative Teaching**

General education and special education teachers are most effective they work as equal partners in a collaborative teaching relationship to plan, teach, and assess the students they share (Ripley, 1997). Promoting the collaborative partnership between special education and general education teachers is essential to students' success and the acquisition of grade-level standards (Maccini & Gagnon, 2000 as cited Rimpola, 2014). Collaboration not only benefits students with disabilities, but the whole team as well. The roles and responsibilities of all team members will provide a better understanding of the services needed for the students. Building relationships and maintaining communication the entire year will build a better collaborative team. Collaboration often describes the various adult school activities: governance, leadership, co-teaching, collegiality, shared vision, and sharing expertise and experience (Damore & Wiggins, 2006). Bonati (2018) found that in a collaborative partnership, all students benefit from the planning and collaboration between co-teachers when conversations are focused on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Students with disabilities benefit from collaboration among professionals, which creates an effective learning environment (Leader-Janssen et al., 2012). According to research, teachers not only need expert knowledge of co-teaching models, but also the ability to collaborate effectively in order to implement research-based co-teaching models through effective co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing. (Sparks, 2013; Murawski & Lochner, 2010 as cited in Brendle, 2017). General education educators must work collaboratively and seek out other team members' perspectives and expertise (Leader-Janssen et al., 2012).

## Professional Learning

One way to support teachers is through effective professional learning communities (Blanton & Perez, 2011; DuFour et al., n.d). Professional learning has become a necessity in improving instructional practices for teacher and student growth. Successful professional development "prepares teachers for the changing nature of their work" (Glickman, Gordon, Ross-Gordon, p. 59). Schools are continuously adopting ways to improve professional learning communities to engage learners and provide support for teachers. Effective professional development addresses common teaching and learning challenges that occur on a daily basis. (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). DuFour et al. (2010) argue that the work of PLCs is a continuous cycle of improvement, inquiry, and actionable research that produces better outcomes for students.

DuFour et al. (2010) suggests building a collaborative culture through high-performing teams. As opposed to working in isolation, effective teams bring together individuals who work towards a common goal (Du Four, 2006). Professional learning communities allow for opportunities to conduct peer observations, share feedback, and coaching or mentoring. (Teque & Anfara, 2012). Aguilar (2016) shares six big bucket reasons for professional learning meetings: to "share information, to learn something, to solve problems, to make decisions, to plan, and to build community" (p. 107). Blanton and Perez (2011) provide an overview of the characteristics of professional learning communities based on multiple literature reviews that shifted school improvements, such as school culture, collegiality, and collaboration. The professional learning communities at Rural High School were structured to reflect and model each of the major characteristics of Blanton and Perez literature research on a Professional Learning Community (Figure 3: Major Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community).

**Figure 3**

*Major Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community, (Blanton and Perez, 2011)*


## Characteristics of Professional Learning

### *Characteristic 1: Supportive and Shared Leadership*

As the researcher, I supported participants during professional learning (PL) meetings by providing academic resources during the establishment of new procedures in collaborative planning. Sharratt and Planche (2016) determined that "shared ownership of the outcomes and the infusion of skilled collaborators are factors that develop strong teams" (p. 147). Participants were involved in making decisions on the collaborative process and given opportunities to share their insight on instructional practices.

### *Characteristic 2: Open Dialogue/Collaboration*

During PL, SPED and general education teachers had opportunities to experience open dialogue given time for reflection by using established questions on an agenda to guide conversations and learn from each other.

***Characteristic 3: Shared Vision, Values, Goals***

As the researcher, I worked with the participants at the beginning of the study to develop a shared vision of collaborative planning. I provided them with an overview of how the professional learning implemented included resources for the collaborative process and focused on the collaboration of SPED and general education teachers. An agenda provided a guide and a tool for documentation (Appendix F) of meeting minutes. The agenda was designed to focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. For the purposes of this study, curriculum and instruction was the primary focus of the collaborative process.

***Characteristic* 4: *Student Centered School Improvement***

Analyzing assessment data is one major characteristic of identifying student improvement needs. However, assessment data and identifying ways to improve student outcomes was not an area of focus during the eight week study. The study focused on teacher perspectives of collaborative planning to improve instructional practices. In order to improve student achievement, participants needed to understand how to collaborate with each other and how to improved instruction would promote professional growth.

***Characteristic 5*: *Supportive Environment***

As the researcher of the study and administrator of RHS, I provided leader support for professional learning and collaborative planning meetings. It is the responsibility of administrators to encourage and develop a culture of collaboration that is pervasive and embedded in the school's day-to-day operations (Blanton and Perez, 2011). In order to support participants, I was actively engaged in the collaboration process and professional learning activities. Throughout the interviews and observations, I listened to the conversations to

determine the needs of the participants and provided additional resources to improve their instructional practices.

***Characteristic 6: Ongoing Inquiry/Reflective Practice***

The participants, with my support, were given adequate time to continue ongoing professional learning and reflect on problems in their practice and explore problems openly in weekly collaboration.

## Theoretical Frameworks

This study discussed two theoretical frameworks: adult learning theory and leadership theory.

### Adult-Learning Theory

According to Merriam-Webster's dictionary (n.d.), andragogy is defined as "the art or science of teaching adults." Research into adult learning found that teachers need to create links between new knowledge and prior experiences while being provided with time to implement new practices into their instruction (Glickman et al., 2001). Malcolm Knowles (1980) is known for his work on helping adults learn and popularized the concept of andragogy. His work tells us that adult learners are different from younger students. Knowles's research states that adults need to know why they should learn something, how learning will help them specifically, why they need to be motivated, how to be self-directed and want to take charge, as well as bring prior knowledge and experiences that form a foundation of their learning (WGU, 2020). For teacher leaders to effectively work with adult learners, relationship building and facilitating positive professional learning should be prioritized in improving teacher knowledge and skills. We can view teacher development against the background of adult learning, development, motivation (illustrated in Figure 4: Influences on Teacher Development),

influences on the school's work environment, and characteristics of the teaching profession (Glickman et al., 2001).

Knowles (1984) suggested four principles that are applied to adult learning:

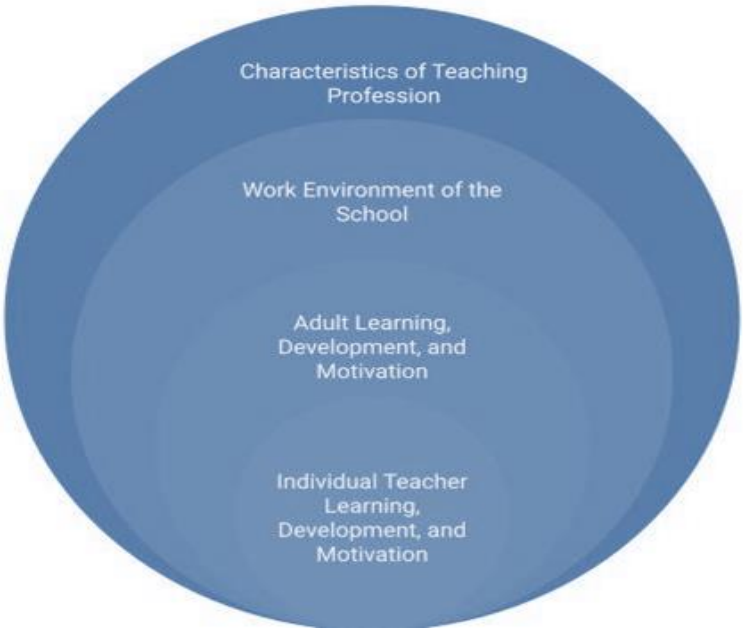
1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience, including mistakes, provides the basis for learning activities.
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to their job or personal life.
4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

Knowing that adult learners' needs may be different from what teachers already know about children's learning needs, "we think a crucial ingredient in teaching adults effectively is attention to planning" (Levin & Schrum, 2017, p.58). Dirkx (2001) explains how adults are most interested in learning subjects that directly relate to their job or personal life. Merriam (2017) agrees that learning involves our emotions, body, and spirit. She emphasized that adult learning theory has been centered in more holistic conceptions of learning; that is, learning is viewed as more than just the cognitive processing of information.

Adult learners can set goals, decide their why, review material regularly, and embrace hands-on learning (WGU, 2020). According to Owen (2014), significant school innovations include transformations in the role of learners and teachers, organizational and pedagogical restructuring, and utilizing resources (p. 55). Darling-Hammond et. al, (2009) indicated that "If teachers sense a disconnect between what they are urged to do in professional development activity and what they are required to do according to local curriculum guidelines, then the professional development tends to have little impact" (p. 10).

**Figure 4**

*Influences on Teacher Development (Glickman et al., 2001)*




## Leadership Theory

"Despite the many diverse leadership styles, an effective leader inspires, motivates, and directs activities to help achieve group or organizational goals" (Amanchukwu et al., 2015, p. 6). Leadership theories seek to explain and describe the qualities of leaders and how to build on those qualities (WGU, 2020). Eberly et al. (2013) point out that effective leadership starts with an individual leader and then rises to a dyad and entire collective, ultimately determining the context within which leadership occurs.

Two leadership theories relevant to this study included transformational theory and participative theory. Warrick (2011) found that transformational leadership focuses on "leadership skills and takes leadership to a new level of transforming organizations and sets them to a new course of action" (p.12). Participative leadership provides a "two-way communication to provide organizations with creativiey and innovation" (Mehdipour & Mobehikia, 2019, p. 4).

### *Transformational Theory*

Transformational theory focuses on the "connections between leaders and followers" (Amanchukwu et al., 2013; Mango, 2018). Transformational leadership theory, also known as relationship theory, is a motivational leadership style that involves connecting with employees, understanding their needs, and helping them reach their potential. The transformational theory is referred to as relationship theory (Fitzgerald and Schutte, 2009). These leaders 'inspire' and 'motivate' people to perform at high standards. "Authentic relationships allow individuals to have questioning discussions, share information openly, and achieve mutual and consensual understanding" (Sammut, 2014, p. 51). Research found that transformational leaders can often influence their employees own perceptions of achievement, skills, and attributes (Camps and Rodriquez, 2009). Camps and Rodriquez (2009) determined that relationships built between transformational leadership and worker performance prove how important relationships are in the workplace. These relationships are characterized by shared honesty, respect, listening, compassion, and a common vision. In this study, transformational leadership theory was important when creating new procedures in collaborative planning and professional learning. Treslan (2010) defines transformational leadership as "embracing participatory decision making, reflection, and self-awareness" (p. 59). This form of leadership empowered participants to take an active role in self-awareness and reflection on instructional practices. Empowerment will share a sense of ownership on the part of the leader and followers (Treslan, 2010). Participants were given opportunities for empowerment during collaborative planning and professional learning sessions through input on professional learning topics.

***Participative Theory***

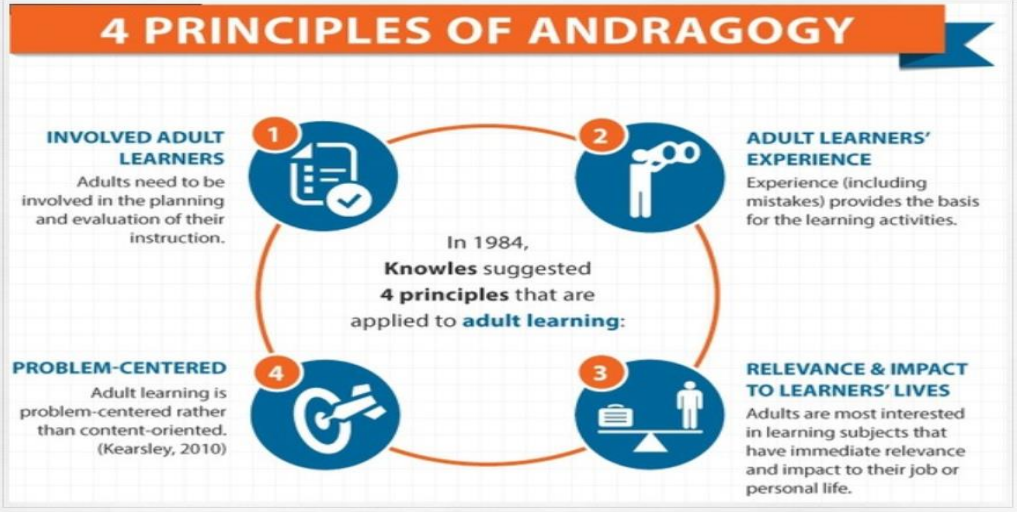
Participatory theory (WGU, 2020), also known as democratic leadership, recommends employee participation in decision-making. Amanchukwu et al. (2013) suggest individuals are more likely to be involved and feel included when they are given an opportunity to contribute to the decisions being made.

Leadership is not solely the responsibility of the administration. Participants lead discussions during the collaborative planning or modeled a lesson to assist a colleague with a concept. According to Costa and Garmston (2002), cognitive coaching describes the assistance to support a teacher in self-directed learning while improving instruction. The administrators at RHS provide teachers with guidance in becoming better teachers and build relationships with teachers throughout professional learning sessions while also developing leaders among the participants.

Knowles's (1984) four principles, as illustrated in Figure 5: 4 Principles of Andragogy, guided the implementation of collaborative practices. Activities for each of the principles provided strategies for participants to understand how their experience could assist with the planning and evaluated their instruction.

**Figure 5**

*4 Principles of Andragogy (Pappas, 2014)*



## Relationship between Collaborative Planning and Adult Learning Theory

### Principles of Andragogy

#### *Principle 1: Involve Adult Learners*

Before beginning the collaborative meetings, the participants were asked to complete a collaborative planning self-assessment (GADOE, 2018) that addressed current individual levels of collaborative best practices (Appendix G). The assessment allowed teachers to rate themselves based on a "no or yes" scale to identify priorities of collaborative planning. This allowed me, the researcher, to address individual needs and develop an influential professional learning community based on the evaluation of each participant.

Next, the selected participants met during their assigned weekly collaborative planning to analyze current collaborative practices using a High Impact Collaborative Planning Rubric (GADOE, 2018; Appendix H). The rubric addressed seven standards with ratings of exemplary, operational, emerging, and not evident. These ratings revealed how teachers viewed RHS's current collaborative planning sessions.

Teachers were involved in the planning, implementation, and feedback stages as they collaborated and chose instructional practices to improve teaching and learning. They needed to understand why collaborative planning was beneficial and how it could improve student learning.

#### *Principle 2: Adult Learners/Experience*

All participants of the study had experiences that benefited the collaborative planning sessions. Finding ways to link these experiences to the discussions during the collaborative planning meetings gave teachers a sense of belonging and time to explore new ways to redeliver curriculum to students. When designing professional learning sessions, teachers' learning styles

were taken into consideration. Adult learners need to learn in their way (Rusmussen, 2015). Kolb (2020) describe experiential learning allows the learner to regulate his own learning while also understanding himself as the learner, which in turn, allows for the ideal learning experience. When adults understand the need for information, they become motivated to develop a new skill. Through targeted professional development, schools can develop and improve their own teachers and their levels of effectiveness, thereby establishing a cohort of experts within their own schools Hattie (2015).

***Principle 3: Relevance & Impact to Learner's Lives***

Adults need to understand the relevance of or need for collaborative planning and how instructional practices impact student success. Engaging participants in the professional learning communities increased the impact and relevance of collaborative sessions. Protocols were established for expectations, trust, purpose, agendas, and other necessary documents for collaborative planning. For example, an agenda was developed and discussed in professional learning communities. As the facilitator, modeling the use of an agenda keeps the discussion focused. Examples of items on a collaborative agenda included student learning, the sharing of instructional practices, experiences, and setting goal-oriented assignments.

***Principle 4: Problem Centered***

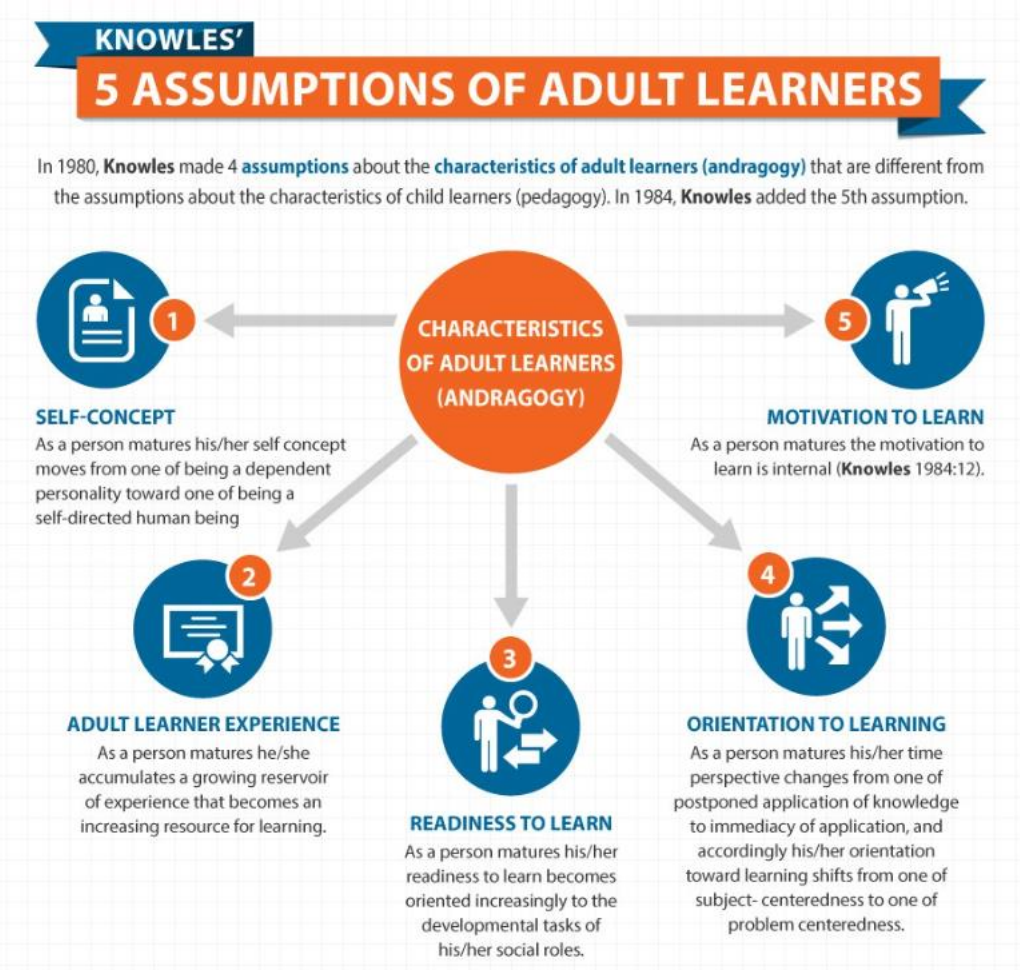
Sood (2018) identifies the reasons why adult learners are interested in problem-centered learning and how they react to the identified issues. There is a difference between what teachers need to know and what they need to do. As a result of problem-centered learning, schools can establish procedures that will allow adult learners to adapt, learn, and perform more efficiently (Sood, 2018).

Teachers at RHS discussed barriers and determined solutions during weekly collaborative planning sessions. In addition, SPED and general education teachers met to discuss curriculum, instructional practices, student outcomes, and assessments to improve instruction and understood the impact collaborative planning had on teacher growth and effectiveness.

A key element of Knowles work establishes the educator as the facilitator, guiding students through the learning process (1980, 1984). As illustrated in Figure 6: Characteristics of Adult *Learners*, Knowles's work on adult learning addresses five assumptions that supported the need for structured collaboration among teachers.

**Figure 6**

*Characteristics of Adult Learners (Pappas, 2014).*



## Assumptions of Collaboration

### *Assumption 1: Self-Concept*

The assumption is that all participants in the study moved from independent planning to collaborative planning and were actively involved in conversations to reflect around research based instructional practices. DuFour et al. (n.d.) shared that low levels of student proficiency are a direct result of the lack of collaboration by teachers. This process allows the learner increased control and self-direction in the learning process within established boundaries and guidelines (Blondy, 2007 , p. 120).

### *Assumption 2: Adult Learner Experience*

Participant experiences ranged from novice to veteran teaching status. One assumption was that veteran teachers would share their experiences to provide resources for novice teachers during collaborative planning and created an open and honest learning environment. Additionally, novice teachers gained experience over the study in order to participate fully. Another assumption was that novice teachers brought with them new research-based practices, better digital fluency, and new teaching resources.

### *Assumption 3: Readiness to Learn*

Professional development must be meaningful for all learners. The assumption is that all learners engaged in conversation to identify and focus on their own learning needs, established goals to accomplish in the future, and expanded on one's objectives (Blondy, 2007).

### *Assumption 4: Orientation to Learn*

The study assumed that teachers altered their perceptions of collaboration when adult learning needs were met during the process. I assumed participation in professional learning would equip teachers with collaborative practices that would be evident during collaborative

planning sessions. Additionally, I assumed that teachers participated in the collaborative planning sessions and developed their professional knowledge.

**Assumption 5: Motivation to Learn**

One assumption was that participants were motivated to change their practices and perceptions of collaborative planning. Therefore, I assumed responsibility in providing each participant with expectations and goals and ensured that all participants left the professional learning or collaborative planning sessions with something of value.

**Summary**

The literature review explored collaboration, instructional leadership, professional learning communities, cooperative teaching, adult learning theory, and leadership theories. In addition, the review identified the principles and assumptions of andragogy to illustrate the importance that relationships have on adult learning to improve collaborative practices.

After reviewing the literature on the effects of teacher collaboration, a gap in the literature was found. The research explains how collaboration was essential to teacher learning, but fails to suggest how to implement or improve a collaborative process. A gap found in the literature that my study might help overcome is the lack of research identifying how to structure time between SPED teachers and general education teachers. Chapter three details the methodology of the study.

# Chapter Three

## Methodology

The qualitative case study aimed to understand teacher perspectives on the collaborative process. Additionally, the study was designed to improve teacher learning by promoting effective instructional practice through professional learning. Chapter three includes the research tradition, the researcher's worldview, and research questions. The chapter includes a description of the setting, participants, and data sources. The chapter concludes with the trustworthiness of the study, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

### Research Tradition

A qualitative intrinsic case study with a holistic approach was the design used in this study (Johnson & Christensen, 2017; Stake 2015). A case study as defined by Harrison et al. (2017) considers the context of the research in relations to the real world. A case study as defined by Creswell and Poth (2018) is "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (p. 96). Yin (2018) defines a case study as a twofold definition. According to Yin (2018), qualitative research studies a current issue through the lens of the real world and is supported through evidence. Additionally, the method of investigation into the current issue is the dominant feature.

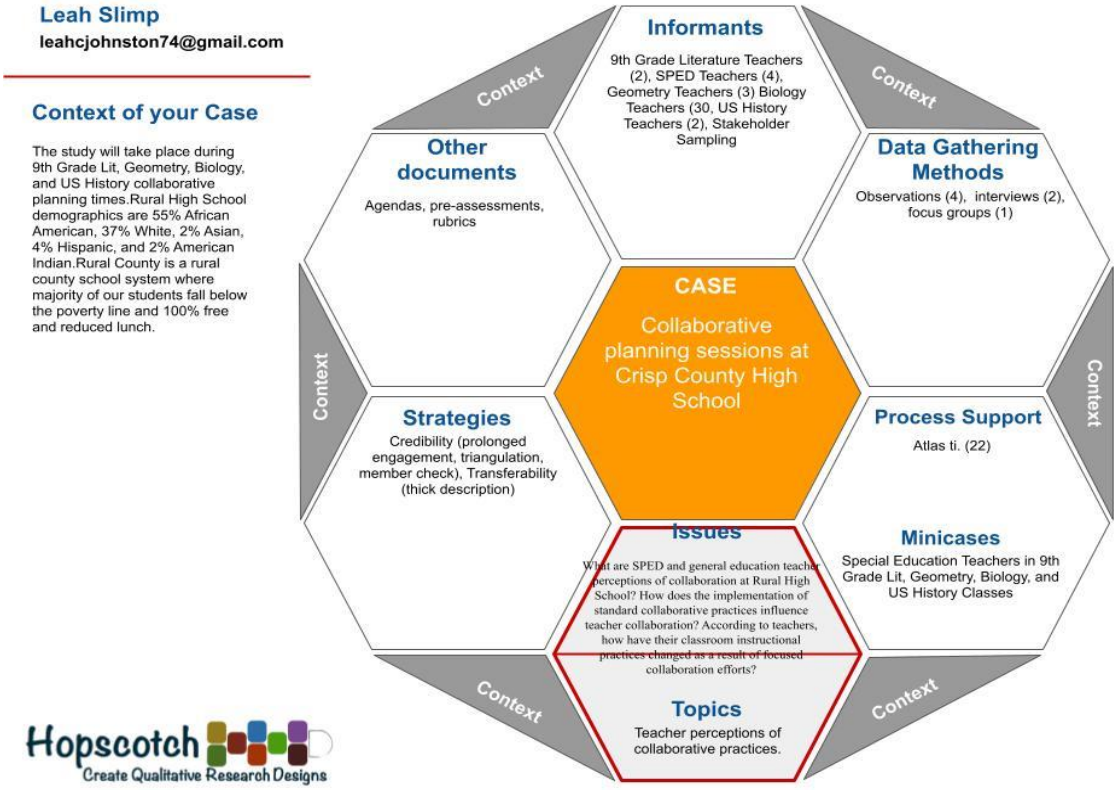
As a teacher leader and active participant in the research, I selected a qualitative case study that examined the changes in collaborative planning time, professional learning structures, and how the changes in structures and professional learning impacted teacher perceptions of collaboration. The study aimed to analyze each content area and determine whether built-in common planning time for all teachers would impact teacher learning and alter teachers'

perceptions of collaborative practices. The study allowed me to grow as a teacher leader by developing professional learning objectives while coaching participants through the collaborative process. Creswell (2014) states that qualitative research "explores and understands the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a problem" (p.4). By creating the structures to promote collaboration between SPED and general education teachers, I hoped to see a difference in teachers practices and perceptions of collaboration. As the teacher leader, I shared my knowledge of collaborative practices with my colleagues and met their individual needs as they became more engaged in the professional learning community.

Figure 7, case study context, provided a visual representation of the case study using the Hopscotch Model developed by Jorrín-Abellán. The graphic was formulated to guide the research design and assisted with understanding a qualitative research design.

**Figure 7**

*Case Study Context* (Jorrín-Abellán, 2019).



**Worldview**

My study explored teachers' perceptions of collaboration and how a schedule that included dedicated collaborative planning could improve perceptions through professional growth. Long term change could result if teachers were to engage in an on-going and reflective process of professional development (Lynch, 2012). Teacher perspectives were vital in understanding how effective collaborative planning impacted teacher learning. According to Wiggins and McTighe (1998), a perspective is a powerful form of insight. They explain that by shifting perspective and casting familiar ideas in a new light, one can create new theories, stories, and applications. During the interview process, I recorded responses to open-ended questions to determine common themes in the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), researchers use their own experiences and backgrounds to analyze and interpret findings.

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that individuals seeking to understand the world they live in and work in are social constructivists. Social constructivism aligned with my personal beliefs, as well as my research topic. The decisions made within a school regarding teacher selection and curriculum development must be within the powers of school leaders to effectively and efficiently impact student achievement (Lynch, 2018). The interpretive framework supported the surveys and interviews given to teachers as they provided perspectives of collaboration during common planning. The worldview allowed me, the researcher, to look for knowledge gained through connecting my own experiences and interactions with others (Brau, 2018). Although my experiences are different from the teachers in my study, I used my background to "shape interpretation in the research and view the teachers' interpretation from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (Brau, 2018, p. 24).

**Research Questions**

1. What are SPED and general education teachers' perceptions of collaboration at Rural High School?
2. How does the implementation of common collaborative practices influence teacher collaboration?
3. According to teachers, how have their classroom instructional practices changed as a result of focused collaboration efforts?

**Setting**

The setting for this study was at Rural High School (RHS), a rural public high school operating in the Rural School District. The district has one high school which employees approximately 125 faculty and staff. The public high school serves ninth to twelfth grade with an enrollment of over 1,000 students. The student-to-teacher ratio each year is approximately 17:1, with a 60% minority enrollment.

RHS is 100% economically disadvantaged, and all students qualify for free and reduce lunch. Student diversity is 55.2% black and 36.3% white, with low Asian, multi-racial, American Indian, and Hispanic percentages. Students with disabilities average at 10.4%, while the English Language Learner population stands at 0.9%. All students are challenged economically. The county is supported by Title 1 funds and is considered the poorest town in the state of Georgia.

Four high school academic areas were as selected participants for the study: 9th Grade Literature, Biology, US History, and Geometry. A total of ten academic teachers and four SPED teachers were asked to participate in the study. Teachers participated in two individual one-on-one interviews, three collaborative planning observations, and one focus group. Professional

learning, emphasizing collaborative practices, was scheduled twice for two sessions throughout the eight-week study to provide teachers with resources over a semester.

**Participants**

Four core academic departments were selected through stakeholder purposive sampling (Palys, 2008). Palys defines stakeholder purposive sampling as the "identification of who will be involved in the designing, giving, receiving, or administering of the program or service being evaluated and who might otherwise be affected by it" (p. 697). Fourteen out of 38 high school academic and special education teachers (ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade) from Rural High School were invited to participate in this case study based on the master schedule teaching assignment. Four of the eleven special education teachers were selected based on the course assignments designated by the master schedule. Teachers were assigned content-specific courses based on teacher preference and consideration of teachers' personalities for collaborative planning. The teachers worked collaboratively together during the study. According to Leader-Janssen et al. (2012), collaboration is no longer a choice but a necessity to establish effective instruction.

All teachers had common planning to allow for observations and interviews. Teachers selected were invited to participate in the study via a descriptive email (Appendix A) detailing the purpose of the study, requirements for participation, and why they were chosen for the study. Each participant was given a consent form (Appendix B) to sign once the participant returned an electronic response to me from the original email by a return receipt date.

Participants invited included two 9$^{th}$ Grade Literature teachers and the assigned co-teacher, three Geometry teachers and the assigned co-teacher, three Biology teachers and the assigned co-teacher, and two U.S. History teachers and the assigned co-teacher for a total of

fourteen teachers. The courses selected were based on two state-level End of Course (EOC) content areas and two non-EOC content areas. The EOC courses were selected based on previous low state assessment scores. Two non-EOC courses selected include three teachers new to the content and four teachers who had taught the subject for one to two years. These courses were removed from the testing pool by the State Board of Education within the past year. The subjects assigned to this case study represented each academic area (ELA, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies).

The participants' teaching experiences ranged from two to fifteen years. Of the fourteen teachers, one teacher had a provisional certificate based on the county strategic waiver. One of the five teachers with a bachelor's degree was a novice teacher. Six teachers held a master's degree, and one teacher had a specialist degree. Three of the participants were black and eight of the participants were white. The female participants outnumbered the male participants in the study, nine to two, respectfully.

**Data Gathering Methods**

Qualitative data in this study was collected through open-ended interviews, observations, and a focus group. The data collection aimed to understand the teachers' perspectives on collaboration when a high school master schedule had been redesigned to promote common planning.

Individual interviews were conducted during common planning times or after school and lasted approximately 30 minutes each. Observations were scheduled during collaborative planning throughout the study. Teachers selected a designated time for interviews and observations using a Google Sheet. In addition, the academic coach was involved in co-developing the collaborative framework and debriefing interviews after each observation. The

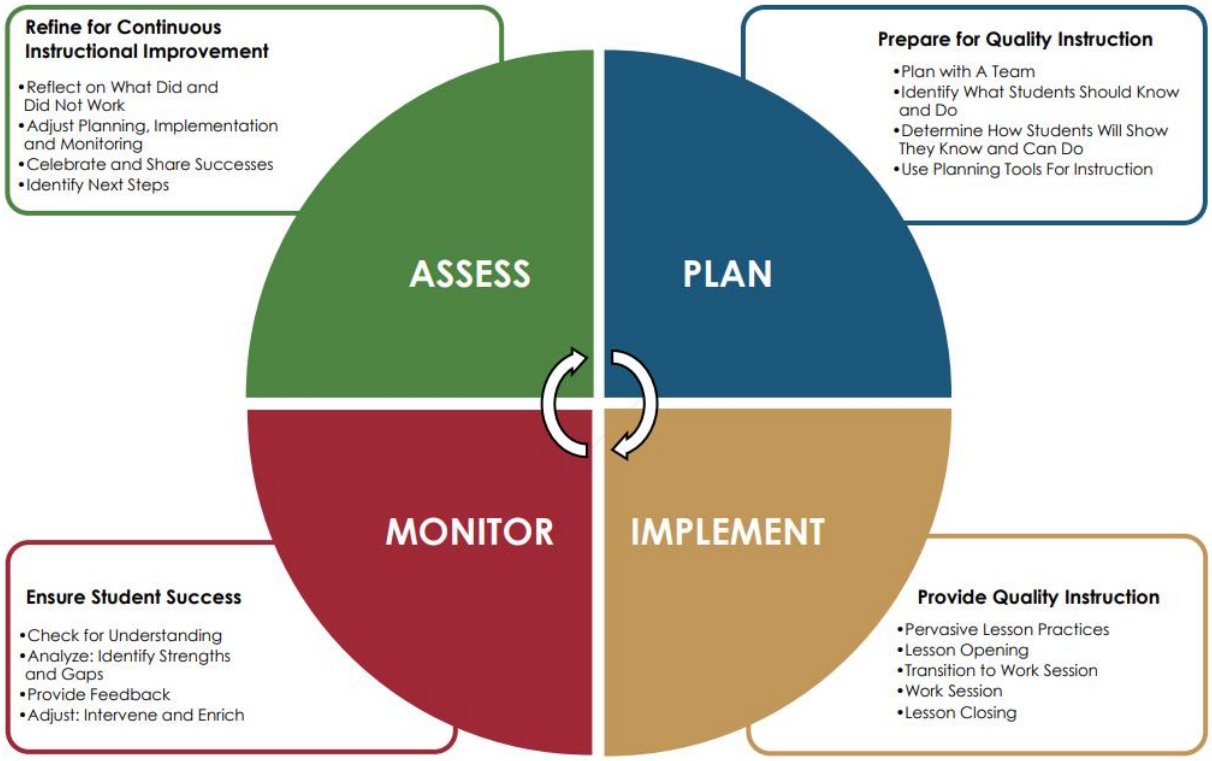
academic coach and I determined specific needs to focus on during professional development. We met before the first professional learning to establish a calendar of events for the time frame of the study. Next, participants met during content-specific planning. Each block contained one core content and the academic coach and I provided appropriate modeling and communication for teachers involved in the study. For example, mathematics teachers planned during the first block while social studies planned during the second. Third block planning was designated for science teachers, and fourth block planning was for English. PL sessions followed the System for Effective School Instruction (GADOE, 2018) to provide effective collaborative professional learning. Participants focused on the "Plan Phase" of the effective instructional program for this study, as shown in Figure 8: Model Instructional System. Participants completed a collaborative planning self-assessment to determine the current level of practice. Throughout the planning phase, teachers planned with a team, identified what students should know and do, determined how students would show what they know and can do, and use planning tools for instruction. Four content areas, two EOC and two non-EOC courses, were chosen to better understand the various teachers' perspectives and how each participant's content influenced their collaborative planning meetings. The four courses, two EOC and non-EOC, were chosen as a comparative element of the study. As the researcher, I also wanted to observe how teachers altered their planning process based on the demands of a state assessment course vs a locally assessed course. Teacher focus group was selected after interviews and observations were conducted. Primary selection was based on a sample group of participants. The participants chosen were one Biology, one Geometry, one 9$^{th}$ Grade Literature, and one SPED teacher.

To investigate teacher perspectives of collaboration, opportunities were available for the participants to attend professional learning sessions that focused on the effectiveness of

collaborative practices. Professional learning was designed with a vision of collaborative planning that promotes teaching and learning. Strategies shared in professional learning focused on collaborative planning expectations, purpose, and goals. This focus reflected on teacher instructional practices which were linked individualized learning. Teacher perspectives of the effectiveness of collaborative planning sessions were considered when developing professional learning communities that provided an instructional model for collaborative planning.

**Figure 8**

*Model Instructional System (GADOE, 2018).*




***Interviews***

Each teacher participated in two "semi-structured" (Stake, 2010) interviews. By using semi- structured interview questions, I was able to adjust my line of questioning to allow for "alternate questions and responses" (Mertler, 2014, p.130). The interviews were scheduled at

the beginning of the study and a follow-up interview at the end of the eight weeks. The one-on-one interviews consisted of open-ended questions following an interview protocol (see Appendix C & D). This allowed teachers to explain their perceptions of collaboration. As, the researcher, I recorded the interview for any additional information shared by the participants. The last interview re-evaluated perceptions and outcomes after collaborative planning had been implemented. The interviews provided data to support the restructuring of the master schedule and identified teacher learning needs. Five questions were directed towards collaborative experiences, perception of collaboration, and benefits of collaboration. Interviews established the need for collaborative planning and assisted in improving teacher learning. Additionally, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The formal interview protocols included:

1. Briefly explain your educational background: degrees, years teaching, content.
2. How long have you taught at RHS?
3. How would you define teacher collaboration from your past experiences?
4. How often have you planned collaboratively with your colleagues in the past and currently?
5. What topics are discussed in your departmental collaborative meetings?
6. How does collaborating with your colleagues benefit you as a teacher?
7. What impact does common planning with your co-teacher or general education teacher have on teacher learning?
8. How do collaborative meetings impact your instructional practices?
9. How often do you participate in school-wide professional learning?
10. Can you describe your current professional learning days at RHS?

11. What is your perception of professional learning at RHS?
12. How do you implement instructional strategies after a professional learning day at RHS?
13. How would you describe your most rewarding professional learning experience at RHS?

***Observations***

Three observations were completed during the length of the study. An observation tool from the Georgia Department of Education was used to identify evidence in common planning. The “look for" components included lesson planning, teacher leadership, standards (Georgia Performance Standards) based instructional planning, and assessments (GADOE, 2018). The first observation was conducted during the first week of the data collection period, and concluded with observations in the last week of the study. Field notes were gathered when observing meetings. These notes recorded what was discussed during collaborative planning time and an analysis of these notes. Johnson (2008), as cited in Mertler (2014), advises to stop thinking and write what you see. These qualitative observations were conducted over eight weeks and lasted approximately 30 minutes to an hour. These observations helped to understand the impact teacher collaboration had on teacher success.

***Focus Groups***

One semi-structured focus group consisted of four teachers and was a representative sample of participants. Johnson and Christensen (2017) identify focus groups as an interview that examines how group members think and feel about a topic. A focus group protocol (see appendix E) will be used to collect qualitative data from all participants. Six questions were be asked during the focus group interview.

The focus group protocol questions included:

1. How has the redesigned master schedule impacted SPED and general education teachers' use of common planning, and how is the teacher learning supported through common planning?
2. How do you collaborate with your co-teacher?
3. Describe the challenges you face in collaborating with your co-teacher and other content area teachers.
4. Can you share some advantages and disadvantages of collaboration?
5. How do teachers support or resist collaborative meetings?
6. How do weekly collaborative meetings impact instructional practices?

**Data Analysis**

Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that data analysis consists of (a) preparing and organizing data, (b) reduce data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and (c) represent data in figures, tables, or discussions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain in order to effectively analyze the data, a researcher must collect, condense and interpret that data, while also taking others findings into consideration. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) recommend a step-by-step process for data analysis. The steps included: (a) naming the categories, (b) determining the number of categories, and (c) figuring out systems for placing data into categories. Analyzing the collected data from the interviews, observations, and focus groups helped to illuminate the research questions.

Coding was used in the qualitative study to increase validity. Saldana (2009) explained that a code in qualitative inquiry is a “word or short phrase that assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p 3).

Coding sorts all data sets according to topics, themes, and issues important to the study (Stakes, 2010).

Interviews were transcribed into a text file using the otter.ai (2016) website. Once the conversations were uploaded and transcribed in Otter, I download them into Atlas.ti 22 to identify themes and patterns for analysis. Similar responses were noted to use as evidence to support teacher perspectives of collaborative practices. The in vivo coding process utlized data to develop the codes in the study. The first step in the analysis, open coding, was to transcribe the interviews and observations to determine specific words or phrases based on the participant's own words. Johnson and Christensen (2017) explained that "open coding involves labeling important words and phrases in the transcribed data" (p. 460). The use of axial coding identified relationships from the interview responses to make connections among the codes. Data was saved as a text file before uploading into Atlas.ti 22. I began to group codes into categories that were similar to each other. Selective coding looked for consistency and determined the main core variable in the data. The observation notes were reviewed to correlate the interview and what steps taken in the collaborative process. A narrative form using tables and graphs was organized for the qualitative content. The focus group members summarized the impact of the collaborative process and answered the research question.

**Trustworthiness**

Shenton (2004) explained how "positivists often question trustworthiness in qualitative research because concepts of validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way in real work" (p. 63). As mentioned in Shenton's (2003) research, Guba proposed four criteria considered for a trustworthy study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Shenton (2004) said one key criterion addressed in credibility is internal validity to ensure studies measure what is intended. Individual interviews, observations, and a focus group involved the triangulation of data in the study. Individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others (Shenton, 2004). Member checking was used to check credibility. When considering triangulation as an approach to evaluate a studies trustworthiness, researchers must consider the validity of the study, as well as other influences (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation data consisted of interviews, observations, and focus group to establish trustworthiness.

Transferability or external validity concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study could be applied to other situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 253). Merriam and Tisdell continued by explaining that a thick description is used as a strategy to enable transferability. It refers to describing the setting, participants, and the findings presented from participant interviews, field notes, and documents. The study provided transferability through detailed descriptions of the setting, participants, and findings in chapter four.

Shenton (2004) defined dependability as a methodology for demonstrating that the same techniques and participants would produce identical results if the experiment was repeated in the same situation. Finally, the study described the research design, data gathering process, and the effectiveness of the process to ensure reliability in future studies.

The concept of confirmability was the qualitative investigator's similar concern to objectivity (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Triangulation was used in the study to avoid influence from the researcher’s bias. I ensured the participants’ ideas were reported and not persuaded by personal beliefs.

## Ethical Assurances

I completed all the necessary training and requirements of the Kennesaw State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the approval process. Teachers identified in the study were sent an email informing them of the study and consent form. They were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary. Since five of the participants were evaluated by me using the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES), I assured them that their observations would have no impact on their evaluations throughout the school year. All observations and interviews remained confidential throughout the study.

## Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation of this study was the role I played as researcher and administrator to five of the participants. The participants may have not responded honestly to the open-ended interview questions. Teachers were reassured that participation in the case study would not be reflected in their TKES evaluations at the end of the school year. The data collection of the study was bound to eight weeks due to the end of the year testing window, which required the researcher and participants to work on a strict schedule. Replicating this study would require similar demographics and may demonstrate different results.

## Summary

Chapter three provided a detailed description of the research tradition, researcher's worldview, and research questions. Additionally, the setting, participants, and data sources were provided to give a detailed outline of how the findings guided the aim of the study and understanding of teacher perspectives of collaboration after the implementation of common collaborative practices. Chapter four gives detail research findings to the study and chapter five summarizes the research questions and provides recommendations to the study.

# Chapter Four

## Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate how teachers in a rural high school setting perceived collaborative practices. I specifically wanted to find out how the participants perceived collaborative practices before and after implementing a structured protocol for collaborative planning. Data was collected through two interviews, three observations, and one focus group over an eight week period during the 2022 spring semester. A timeline (table 1) was created to show the weekly progress and requirements for the study. This chapter will be divided into sections and organized by content: participant demographics, collaborative planning self-assessment, interviews, observations, focus group, data findings: research question one, research question two, research question three, three themes, collaborative meetings, and professional learning. The results in this chapter are summarized and analyzed in detail with three themes, including figures and tables, and guided by the following three research questions:

1. What are SPED and general education teachers' perceptions of collaboration at Rural High School?
2. How does the implementation of standard collaborative practices influence teacher collaboration?
3. According to teachers, how have their classroom instructional practices changed as a result of focused collaboration efforts?

**Table 1**

*Timeline of the study.*

| Week | Dates | Event/Activity |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | January 3-7 | Meet with each participant, Complete Pre Self-Assessment, Pre-Interviews, Prepare Professional Learning lesson |
| 2 | January 10-14 | Professional Learning 1, Observation 1 (Geometry, Biology, 9th Grade Lit), Review Self-Assessment data |
| 3 | January 17-21 | Review Observation 1 responses, prepare professional learning activity based on self-assessment |
| 4 | January 24-28 | Observation 2 (Geometry, Biology, 9th Grade Lit) |
| 5 | January 31-February 4 | Prepare Professional Learning lesson 2, review observation 2 data |
| 6 | February 7-11 | Professional Learning 2 |
| 7 | February 14-18 | Observation 3 (Geometry, Biology, 9th Grade Lit) and review the observation |
| 8 | February 21-28 | Post Interviews, Focus Group Interview, review transcripts, Complete Post Self-Assessment |

## Participant Demographics

Chapter three briefly provided an overview of the participant demographics based on preliminary data. Before learning about participants' perspectives, additional educational information was gathered to gain a better understanding of each participant.

Of the fourteen teachers selected to participate, eleven agreed to fully commit to the study. The three US History teachers declined the invitation to participate. The novice and veteran teacher showed no initiative to participate in the study. The SPED teacher was asked by administration to teach extended day which made it impossible to meet with the researcher. The educational background questions revealed that four participants had taught 0-5 years (36%), two participants had 6-12 years of experience (18%), and four participants had 13-18 years of

experience (46%) (Figures 9, 10, 11, and 12). Of the eleven participants, six participants have taught only at RHS. Five of the participants have taught in multiple school districts. Levels of undergraduate and graduate certification degrees vary in the participant group. There were two participants (18%) with T-4 certifications, eight (73%) with T-5, and one (18%) with a T-6 (Table 2). Seven of the participants received an undergraduate degree in other fields of study requiring further certification requirements to obtain a teaching certificate. Two gained certification through the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy (GaTAPP) program, four earned a masters degrees in education, and one participant was pursuing a masters degree for certification. Two participants were pursuing doctoral degrees during this study.

All three 9th Grade Literature teachers possessed non-educational undergraduate degrees prior to gaining a masters degree in education. Two of the three teachers had 20 years of combined experience, while the SPED teacher had less than five years. Geometry had four participants; two of the participants earned undergraduate educational degrees, one obtained a teaching certificate by following a non-traditional route, and one of the math participants worked on a provisional until certification was completed. All four teachers had a total of 27 years of combined experiences. The four biology participants had a diverse list of certifications. One biology teacher had a bachelors and masters in Art Education, but successfully passed the GACE certification to become a science teacher. She was the veteran teacher of this group with 17 years of experience. The SPED teacher in this department earned a bachelors degree and had 16 years of experience. The teacher with six years' experience had a Bachelors Degree in Biology and master degree in teaching. Finally, the last participant in biology pursued the GATAPP program to become a certified science teacher with a bachelors in biology and chemistry. She had four

years of classroom experience. Table 2 shows the demographic information for each participant.

**Table 2**

*Demographic information for each participant.*

| Participant | Certification | Degree Earned | Content Teach | Years Taught | Years at RHS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ELA 1 | T-5 | Bachelors Theatre Arts<br>Masters of Arts for Teachers | 9th Grade Lit | 14 | 13 |
| ELA 2 | T-5 | Bachelors - Journalism<br>Masters of Education | 9th Grade Lit | 16 | 2 |
| ELA SP | T-5 | Bachelors - Sports Management<br>Masters of Arts in Teaching, SPED | 9th Grade Lit (SP) | 4 | 4 |
| Math 1 | T-4 | Bachelor - Sports Management | Geometry | 3 | 3 |
| Math 2 | T-5 | Bachelor - Sports Management<br>Masters - Kinesiology | Geometry | 3 | 3 |
| Math 3 | T-6 | Masters<br>Educational Specialist | Geometry | 12 | 12 |
| Math SP | T-5 | Bachelors -<br>Masters - SPED | Geometry (SP) | 13 | 9 |
| Science 1 | T-4 | Bachelors - Biology minor in psychology and chemistry | Biology | 4 | 4 |
| Science 2 | T-5 | Bachelors - Biology<br>Masters of Arts in Teaching | Biology | 6 | 6 |
| Science 3 | T-5 | Associates - Liberal Arts & Science<br>Bachelor - Art Education<br>Masters - Art Education | Biology | 17 | 4 |
| Science SP | T-4 | Bachelor Early Childhood, SPED | Biology (SP) | 16 | 2 |

**Figure 9**

*Number of years of experience.*

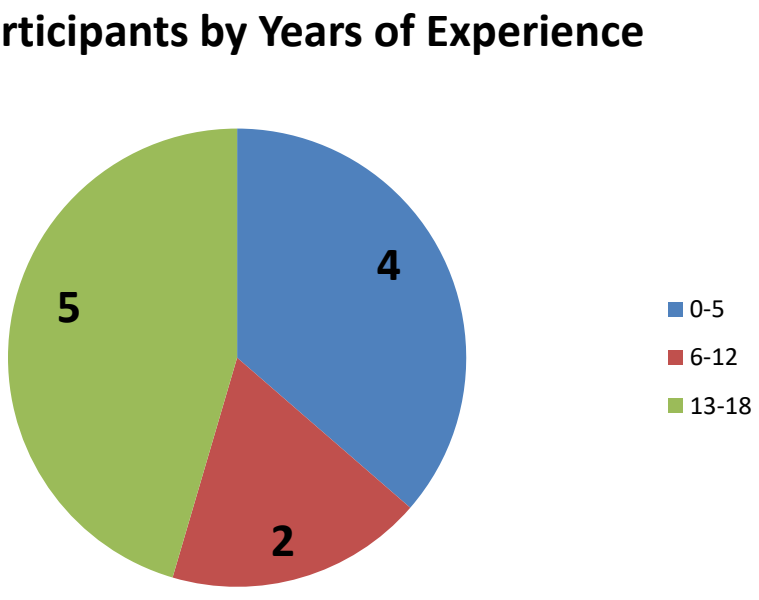


**Figure 10**

*Percentage of each group in years of experience.*

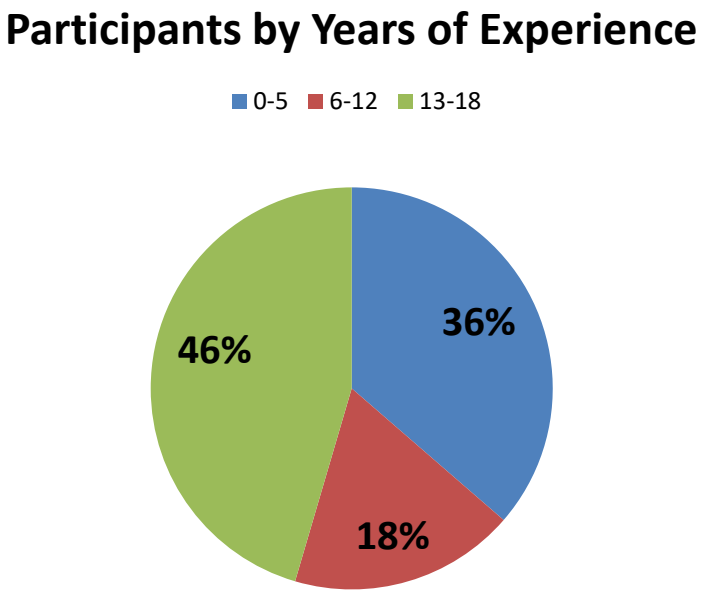



**Figure 11**

*Number of participants for each level of certification.*

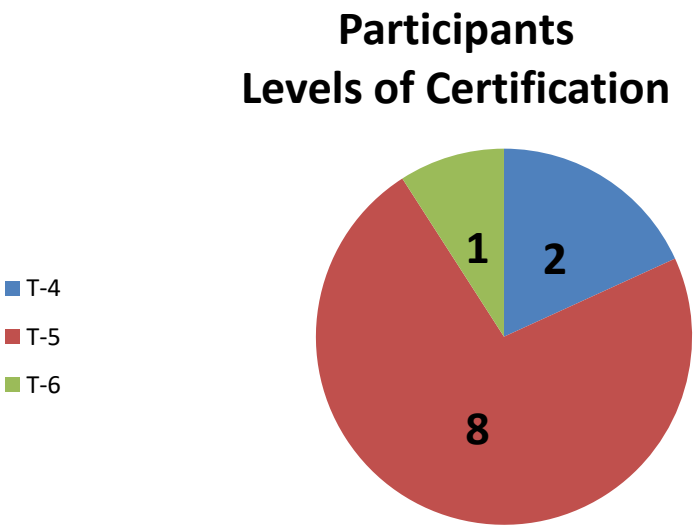
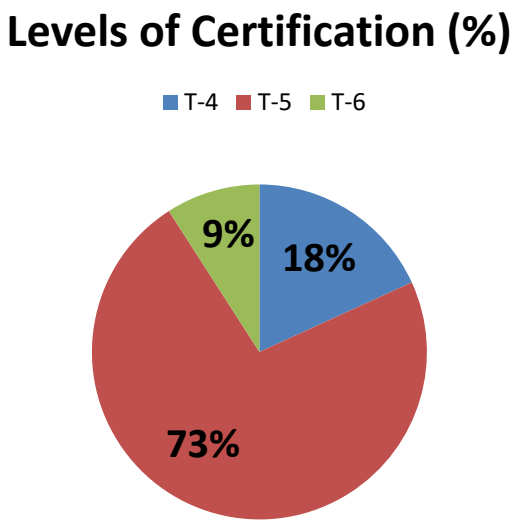


**Figure 12**

*Percentage of participants at each certification level.*




## Collaborative Planning Self-Assessment

### Pre Self-Assessment

Each participant completed a Collaborative Planning Self-Assessment (GADOE, 2018; Appendix G) at the beginning and end of the study. The purpose of the self-assessment was to evaluate the current levels of practice. Each best practice was rated by the participants. Results varied between content; however, there were several practices that were not a primary focus for departments resulting in low ratings. Of the 52 best practices listed, 43 practices were rated by one or more participants as "not practiced on a regular basis".

*9th Grade Lit*

Ninth Grade Literature teachers rated 32 of the 51 practices as meeting the practice on a regular basis during collaboration. Fourteen of the identified practices were not practiced by at least one of the participants. The top six practices that were not met regularly during collaboration for the group were:

4. Conducts peer observations to look for implementation of best practices.
5. Plans for instruction to meet the needs of all students.
6. Plans for remediation, enrichment, and acceleration to further student learning of learning targets.
7. Plans instruction effectively for content mastery, pacing, and transitions.
8. Plans to support alternative program and homebound students.

*Geometry*

As a group, the four Geometry teachers indicated that 18 of the practices were "constant levels of practice". Twenty nine of the best practices were identified as "not active" during collaborative practices for the math group. This group identified four practices as weaknesses:

1. Celebrates best practices observed during peer observations.
2. Conducts peer observations to look for implementation of best practices.
3. Plans to engage students in authentic learning by providing real-life examples and interdisciplinary connections.
4. Plans transitional and graduation plans for identified students.

*Biology*

Biology had fewer ratings where all participants agreed that collaborative best practices were implemented during collaborative meetings. Two participants agreed that 29 practices were not evident in weekly collaboration. The self-assessment revealed that seven practices were identified at low level of implementation during this group. They were:

1. Analyzes summative student data.
2. Celebrates best practices observed during peer observations.
3. Collaborates with others to develop or identify varying types of assessments.

4. Discusses shared readings about research-based best practices.
5. Plans to support alternative program and homebound students.
6. Conducts peer observations to look for implementation of best practices.
7. Co-plans with co-teacher to determine roles and responsibilities of each teacher for upcoming lessons.

The self-assessment revealed that one common level of practice overlapped with the three departments. The common practice among all departments was "C*onducts peer observations to look for implementation of best practices*." Ninth grade Lit and Biology both selected "*Plans to support alternative program and homebound students*" as a common weakness. Biology and Geometry shared a common weakness of "C*elebrating best practices observed during peer observations*."

**Post Self-Assessment**

Participants completed a post self-assessment during the last week of the study. Results varied between departments. I re-evaluated the sixteen practices that were recognized during the pre self-assessment as not meeting the top level of practices for quality collaborative planning. Based on the assessment results, three of the five practices (60%) were rated as met for 9$^{th}$ Grade Lit collaborative planning. Of the four practices identified as weak for Geometry, 50% showed improvement. One participant commented that the group "has done well with celebration but could do more" in regards to the *celebration of best practices during peer observations*. Biology had the least amount of progress (42%) during the eight week study. Only three of the seven practices were identified as improved best practices. A participant stated, "would be great if possible" in reference to the statement *conducts peer observations to look for implementation of best practices.* No improvements were made in the common practices between 9$^{th}$ Grade Lit and

Biology. Geometry improved the common weakness shared with Biology, "C*elebrating best practices observed during peer observations."*

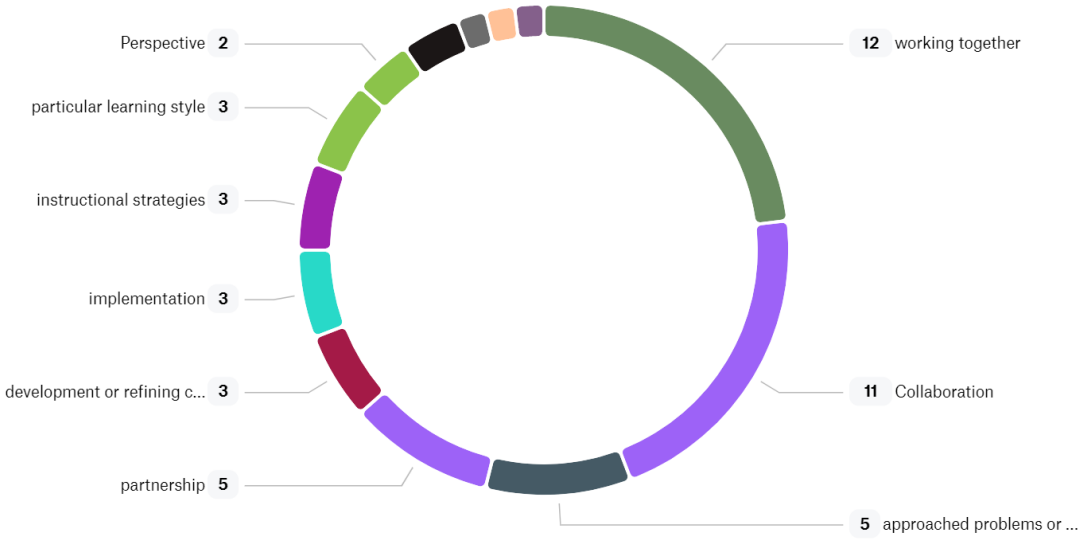
**Interviews**

Two semi-structured interviews were scheduled with each participant and lasted approximately 15-30 minutes. Each interview had eleven open-ended questions (Appendix C & D) which were directly related to the research questions. These questions focused on perceptions of collaboration, implementation of collaborative practices, and perceptions of changes in instructional practices. Each interview was recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai. Once the interview transcripts were complete, I analyzed them for errors, gained understanding of participants' perceptions, and assigned codes prior to identifying themes. Each participant was given an opportunity to individually review his/her transcripts for reliability and trustworthiness. Amankwaa (2016) states that "attending to the language of trustworthiness and the important activities of reliability, add to the comprehensiveness and the quality of the research produce" (p.123).

Nine codes were identified directly from the transcript following the In Vivo Coding process (Figure 13). Open coding was used to identify patterns after reading the interview transcripts. I uploaded the transcripts to the Atlas.ti 22 software to categorize the common themes or patterns from the pre and post interviews. Next, axial coding was used to determine the connections between the themes of the participants perceptions.

**Figure 13**

*Codes developed by using the In ViVo Coding process*




## Observations

Three observations were completed for each collective group throughout the eight week study. I observed each group for approximately 30 minutes. During the meetings, I took field notes and wrote everything that I saw that was important during the observations (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). The observation notes were used to understand the process of teacher collaboration. At the conclusion of the third observation, the High Impact Practice Observation Tool: Collaborative Planning, rubric with descriptors and checklist, was used as a summative tool (Appendix H).

## Focus Group

The focus group was limited to four participants. After the individual interviews and observations, one teacher from each content area and one SPED teacher were selected for the focus group. After reviewing all transcripts, I selected participants who would create a representative sample of content, experience, race, and gender. Protocol questions (Appendix E)

were used during the focus group to assist with identifying a group prospective on how the structured collaborative planning meetings impacted teacher practices.

## Data Collection

Participants met weekly and followed an agenda (Appendix F) to discuss curriculum, instruction, and assessment. This study focused on the curriculum and instruction discussions during weekly collaborative meetings. The two interviews and focus group protocol questions were aligned to each research question. Multiple focus group questions were aligned with the same research question. Outcomes of two focus group questions answered research questions one and two. Research questions two and three shared the results of one interview question. Shared focus group responses, such as research questions one and two, will be described at the end of the data findings section. Results from the pre and post interview questions and focus group indicated a positive outcome as a result of the restructured collaborative planning sessions.

Tables 3 and 4 identify the interview questions related to the assigned research question. Findings for each research question have been identified in the following sections with detailed interview responses and are followed by focus group responses.

**Table 3**

*Related interview questions aligned to with the research question.*

| | **Interview Protocol Question (PRE & POST)** | **Research Question** |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | How would you define teacher collaboration from your past experiences? (Pre) How do you define teacher collaboration (Post) | 1 |
| 2. | How often have you planned collaboratively with your colleagues in the past and currently? | 1 |
| 3. | What topics are discussed in your departmental collaborative meetings? | 2 |
| 4. | How does collaborating with your colleagues benefit you as a teacher? | 1 |
| 5. | What impact does common planning with your co-teacher or general education teacher have on teacher learning? | 2, 3 |
| 6. | How do collaborative meetings impact your instructional practices? | 3 |
| 7. | How often do you participate in school-wide professional learning? | 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8. | Can you describe your current professional learning days at RHS? | 2 |
| 9. | What is your perception of professional learning at RHS? | 1 |
| 10 | How do you implement instructional strategies after a professional learning day at RHS? | 3 |
| 11. | How would you describe your most rewarding professional learning experience at RHS? | 1 |

**Table 4**

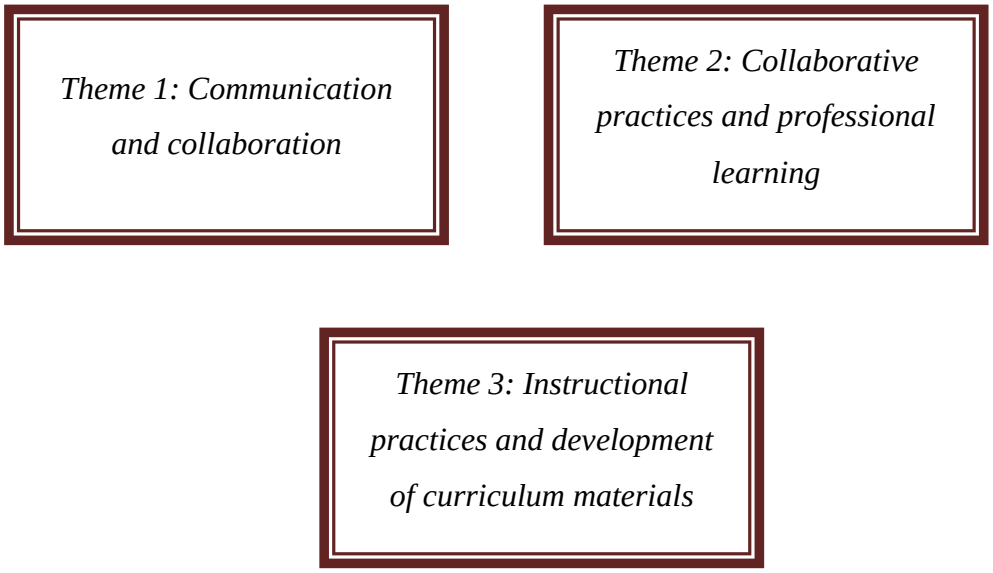
*Related focus group questions aligned to with the research question.*

| | **Focus Group Protocol Question** | **Research Question** |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | How has the redesigned master schedule impacted SPED and general education teachers' use of common planning, and how is the teacher learning supported through common planning? | 2 |
| 2. | How do you collaborate with your co-teacher? | 1, 2 |
| 3. | Describe the challenges you face in collaborating with your co-teacher and other content area teachers. | 2 |
| 4. | Can you share some advantages and disadvantages of collaboration? | 1 |
| 5. | How do teachers support or resist collaborative meetings? | 1, 2 |
| 6. | How do weekly collaborative meetings impact instructional practices? | 2, 3 |

Three themes emerged from the data collected for teacher perceptions of collaborative planning (Figure 14) and aligned with each research question. Research question one examines the theme of *communication and collaboration*. Research question two examines the theme *collaborative practices and professional learning*. Research question three examines the theme of *instructional practices and development of curriculum materials*. Each research question provides rich descriptions that further illustrate and highlight participant perspectives through interviews and focus group responses.

**Figure 14**

*Themes emerged from data collected for teacher perceptions of collaborative practice.*




**Research Question One**

Research question one asked, "What are SPED and general education teacher perceptions of collaboration at Rural High School?" Theme one emerged from the members open discussion which promoted clarity. One participant shared that in past meetings teachers would hoard their lesson plans and not share ideas with the other teachers in the department. Participants in this study transitioned from timid and resistant to cooperative in a short period of time. It was evident in the observations that participants had authentic and engaged conversations that allowed them to become more comfortable in the discussions. At the beginning of the study, participants followed the agenda, answered questions, and moved on to complete the necessary requirements for collaborative planning. Overtime, participants began to have more in-depth conversations that allowed them to become comfortable with planning protocols each week.

**Theme 1: *Communication and Collaboration***

Communication and collaboration was more transparent as a result of more authentic interactions. Participants agreed that collaboration would happen "informally" while standing in the hallways or in passing. Collaboration between each group has developed into longer weekly meetings that have made them eager to discuss strategies to improve instruction. The following quotes (Table 5) highlight the positive outcomes of the increased communication and structured collaboration.

**Table 5**

*Communication and Collaboration Theme*

| Participants | Communication and Collaboration |
|---|---|
| 9th Grade Lit 1, focus group | I hear less talk in the hallways about content in all areas. It seems like our discussions are becoming more deliberate each week and more meaningful. |
| Biology 1, interview | For me, teacher collaboration would be everybody working together for a common goal and everyone bringing ideas different topics, anything to the table to help get us to that common goal. |
| 9th Grade Lit 2, interview | I think that when I collaborate with other teachers, I get a better understanding of the content. I like being able to discuss content and data with others because I feel that it makes me a better teacher. It helps me see different perspectives. I also learn new strategies and techniques to use in my classroom. |
| Biology 2, interview | Most collaboration has happened informally in discussions with other teachers. Collaborative meetings were mostly department meetings with occasional discussions about how close our classes were to being on schedule according to the pacing guides. My department now meets to discuss lesson plans and what has worked and what hasn't worked as far as student engagement and student success. Every once in a while we will plan assessments together. |
| 9th Grade Lit 3, interview | Collaboration helps to bridge that gap between gen ed teacher and co-teacher. It's always better to have two content specialist or have both teachers knowing the same amount of content. |
| 9th Grade Lit, observation | Participants became more involved in the collaboration process through intensive discussion on the agenda by asking who, what, where, and how questions. |

***Interviews***

Five interview questions corresponded with this research question. Three of the five questions revealed a change in how both SPED and general education teachers view collaboration at RHS from pre to post.

When participants were asked to define teacher collaboration, they gave experiences of past meetings with a brief definition of collaboration.

> Geometry 3 stated in the first interview, "Sometimes teacher collaboration can be very informative, and sometimes it can be a waste of time if the partnership doesn't produce material that will meet the needs of your students. With this thought in mind my definition of teacher collaboration would be the work of teachers where ideas are both given and received to teach common material similarly whether the strategies produce student achievement of not."

> 9th Grade Lit 2 stated in the first interview , "In past teacher collaboration, I have worked with grade level content teachers building meaningful lessons and curriculum pacing guides/maps, analyzing data and planning for remediation, enrichments, etc. I have also been in "collaborations" where we just followed the State Frameworks verbatim so it wasn't much of collaboration more so meetings to talk about where we were on the frameworks.

Geometry 3 and 9th Grade Lit 2 response changed from the first and second interview.

> Geometry 3 shared that "Teacher collaboration is interactions with teachers of similar content where we're given ideas to bounce off each other. Additionally, discussing strengths and weaknesses of the lessons and figuring out what works well for our students. A lot of discussion, mostly positive interactions that will lead to student growth and achievement."

> According to the 9th Grade Lit 2 participant, she defined collaboration as "For us teacher collaboration is when we all get together, and we discuss the content, the standards, where it's been, where we want it to go, how the students are responding to it, strategies and techniques that we use that don't work and where we want our students to be. So to be able to sit down with people who are like minded and teach the same thing that you teach, and even sometimes the same students because not only do we collaborate with our grade level, but we also collaborate with upper levels as well. So 10th, 11th and 12th grade, we can kind of see that transition between ninth and on through, so it just helps us. The definition of teacher collaboration is just getting together and just going through the data and going through their curriculum and standards and figuring out what best path to carve that is best for our students and for us."

These three participants all defined collaboration as a time to discuss what instruction has worked and what should be changed to improve instruction.

Next, participants were asked, "How does collaborating with your colleagues benefit you as a teacher?" Geometry 2 discussed how collaborating with colleagues benefited him as a new teacher because of their past experiences and resources. He continues by saying he is a big proponent of the phrase "Be proactive and not reactive." He later shared with me at the end of the study that collaboration helps him with resources, how to figure out ways to reach students with differentiation and help with instructional strategies.

Responses to the interview question, "What is your perception of professional learning at RHS?" varied between participants. Geometry 1 participant appeared to misunderstand the question during the first and second interview and referenced collaborative planning meetings rather than focusing on professional learning. Biology 1 participant stated in both interviews that professional learning was "beneficial and tailored to our needs." The 9th Grade Lit 1 participant discussed "how the meetings have no wasted time and the academic coach gives teachers exactly what is needed by listening to teachers." She explained in the second interview that "some sort of topic is discussed with an agenda and then there is usually something applicable that will be incorporated into our classrooms within the next week after meeting."

***Focus Group***

Focus group question four aligned with research question one and selected participant responses are highlighted below. Participants were asked to share some advantages and disadvantages of collaboration.

> 9th Grade Lit 3 shared, "Speaking a little bit from an outside perspective, because I'm not content so I'm not fully immersed in the department so to speak. I'm not an ELA teacher, but I teach students with disabilities in an ELA classrooms. I

> think that something that, not that I don't like but this can kind of relate back to the challenges of it, it's a good thing and a bad thing to increase the level of competition, but sometimes in a collaborative planning session, especially when you're talking about assessment results and data. And what did you, what did one teacher do versus the other teacher when they're teaching the same content? I think that it can kind of cause some friction between the teachers that teach the same thing. But I think more times than not, that's a good thing to have, because it forces us to change as teachers to change the way that we teach something and to try to improve it when actually making changes to make it worse, or making changes to improve it."

> 9th Grade Lit 1 stated, "We've been able with the way that we have done a lot of collaboration where some of the people may be at multiple one for different grade levels and so forth. I think that has greatly benefited our scaffolding, or building upon what we're doing with one grade level one correspond to the next and then the next and being able to identify for the teachers who are going to be to be teaching the next ones or so forth,. strengths and weaknesses of the students, what additional things that may have been prior knowledge in the past that aren't prior knowledge to the students now, how we can fill in the weaknesses of some of the challenges that we've had in previous years for different things. So I think it has helped us to really work on that call that vertical alignment, vertical alignment."

**Research Question Two**

Research question two explores "How does implementation of standard collaborative practices influence teacher collaboration?" Common collaborative practices and professional learning provided necessary structures to change. Prior to the study, collaborative practices were not evident throughout the building. Theme two, *Collaborative Practices and Professional Learning*, derived based on the codes implementation, working together, and collaboration.

**Theme 2:** ***Collaborative Practices and Professional Learning***

Each department had their own way of collaborating and seldom did they implement strategies from professional learning during the instructional day. Professional learning was developed based on the self-assessment data. Weekly collaborative meetings needed to be structured through the development of an agenda. The agenda was updated twice during the study to reflect participant suggestions. The following quotes illustrate how participants altered their planning process as a result of the newly implemented collaborative practices and professional learning (Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Collaborative Practices and Professional LearningTheme*

| Participants | Collaborative Practices and Professional Learning |
|---|---|
| 9th Grade Lit 2, interview | Professional learning has helped develop my instructional strategies, build relationships with my students, and improve academic performance. |
| Biology 2, interview | I find professional learning helpful at all times. It provides us with information that we're not aware of. It's just a way of getting information to all teachers. |
| 9th Grade Lit 3, interview | I take the knowledge that I learned in professional learning and not necessary implement it the next day, but I do a little more research about the topic. I also read on my own so that I better understand the information presented. I take the points that resonate with me and translate it into my classroom or discuss during collaborative planning. |
| Geometry 2, interview | I review the material learned in professional learning and take the strategies and practices learned and apply it to my classroom. I also can apply what we learn and discuss in collaborative meetings. |
| Geometry 4, interview | Collaborative planning is very beneficial to having a successful learning environment. When meeting with SPED, we make sure that we are going over co-teaching strategies and how best to implement them in the classroom along with current paperwork and data on our students. |
| Geometry 3, focus group | One of the strengths of collaboration is it does give you like a toolbox or whatever where you can pull from your idea or your idea, I like this, I don't like this, this may work those children. It's very beneficial or whatever, in terms of having different |

| | |
|---|---|
| | perspectives and being able to get ideas or resources. |
| Biology 2, focus group and observation | The agenda has helped keep everyone focused on the importance of the meeting and given us some guidance on what needs to be discussed. |
| Biology 3, interview | We exchange ideas on strategies, engaging activities, and even classroom management issues.<br>In the post interview, she stated that collaborating with her colleagues benefited her by "sharing new ideas and a fresh perspective on how to teach a particular subject." |

### *Interviews*

When asked to describe current professional learning days at RHS, participants had a variety of perspectives of how a typical professional learning day was designed.

> 9th Grade Lit 3 stated, "We have a variety of topics that we learn about in professional learning. Sometimes it may be an administrator leading it or may be our instructional coach leading it. Sometimes it may be a PBIS person leading it. So those instructional days I mean, they are collaboration in itself, because we're going with our department and we get to discuss those topics together. And as a team, we usually spend time together learning the topics and have a good amount of discussion as well.
>
> Biology 3 gave two different perspectives from the pre and post interview. During the pre-interview, she stated, "When we have technology training often times the instructor assumes we are all technologically advanced and don't check for understanding of all learners." In her post interview, she stated that "We generally meet during our planning, and it has to do with data and from our benchmarks, registration, and other things that are going on at the school."
>
> During the pre-interview, Geometry 3 shared, "PL meets two times a month on Tuesdays. Every Session is beneficial and does not waste any time. We received awesome support and skills from our administration that assist us with improving students' academic performance." In addition to his pre-interview responses, she added during the post interview, "we work on instilling reading in the curriculum, instilling technology in the curriculum, we work on different STEM techniques, and different instructional strategies that will help better service our students."

### *Focus Group*

Focus group question three asked participants to "Describe the challenges you face in collaborating with your co-teacher and other content area teachers."

> 9th Grade Lit 1 shared, “One challenge that I think we face is being able to differentiate when it is a difference of teaching, preference or personality versus making sure that we're all covering standards. Being there's a lot of times when we have to spend a lot of time clarifying that the standard is the point that we're trying to reach. And so it is less about the technique that you use versus the technique. There is a comparison placed in there. It's the variety provides an opportunity for us to whatever we want out of the bag of tricks to be able to meet that standard. And so a lot of it is redirection away from task and on to standard. You may not have any boundaries, I mean, you may want to restructure in this year of how things are gone.”

Focus group question one addressed the relationships between SPED and general education teachers by asking, “How has the redesigned master schedule impacted SPED and general education teachers' use of common planning, and how is the teacher learning supported through common planning?”

> 9th Grade Lit 3 shared, “As a sped teacher, I feel more connected to the content that I'm teaching it because I'm able to, I'm just able to, I'm exposed to more as far as assessment and data from assessment and planning is like instructional planning I think it you may be exposed to it more casually that easier, as a sped teacher to just talk about it casually as well with the teachers because you're more comfortable doing that. It's not just someone else coming in your classroom to serve students with disabilities. It's somebody that knows about your content knows what you're teaching and knows how you're going to assess student learning.”

> Geometry 3 responded, “And for us is kind of like we are able to use various models of co teaching differently. So it's not kind of like a teacher parent role. It's kind of like both the teachers both both are knowledgeable. Both are provided instruction. We're able to feed off each other within the class, because they know we're where we go in and you know, what you plan to do for that day? So it's very beneficial.”

> Biology 2 discussed, “Yeah, I would just add to that what you're saying is much more cohesive whenever and we also get like a perspective that we don't necessarily, we're not trained to I guess as content teachers. We have a little bit of training in it, but it's really nice to have by Thursday, this is gonna be difficult. We need to work on like vocabulary more with this unit or give that outside opinion.”

**Research Question Three**

Research question three asked "According to teachers, how have their classroom instructional practices changed as a result of focused collaboration efforts?" Additionally, three interview questions were aligned to the research question. One of the questions targeted both research questions two and three and will be addressed in a stand-alone paragraph.

To understand if all participants were implementing the new collaborative practices and utilizing the agenda, an interview question asked, "What topics are discussed in your departmental collaborative meetings?" Many of the participants answered the question with responses such as analyzing data, reviewing standards to develop lesson plans, discussing instructional strategies to improve instruction, different activities, and how students are performing in the classroom. The theme that emerged from the research question was *Instructional Practices and Development of Curriculum Materials*.

**Theme 3: *Instructional Practices and Development of Curriculum Materials***

The participants agreed that collaborative meetings improved their instructional practices over the course of the study. Many of the participants learned how to share ideas during collaborative meetings to alter their style of teaching or change their current practices. Excerpts from interviews, observation, and focus group are illustrated in Table 7.

**Table 7**

*Instructional Practices and Development of Curriculum Materials Theme*

| Participant | Instructional Practices and Development of Curriculum Materials |
|---|---|
| Geometry observation | I think we have figured out how to guide and tweak our instruction to better suit the students. |
| Biology 1, interview | Collaborative meetings affect my instructional practices. Hearing teachers use different strategies that enhance their student learning has helped me try new strategies in my classroom. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 9th Grade Lit 3, interview | It helps me to problem solve because I can discuss an issue with my colleagues and they offer suggestions. When I collaborate with my colleagues it teaches me something because my colleagues may not do something the same way that I do or may not think the same way that I think lesson should be taught and just the difference in ideas helped me grow as a teacher because it diversifies my skill set. |
| Biology 2, interview | I think they improve my instructional practices by helping me be more organized, and know clearly what my students should learning each day instead of winging it. It also allows me to get ideas and bounce ideas off of my colleagues. In this way, I can draw off of many more years of experience instead of just my experience. It helps me be more organized so that I can kind of plan out a little bit better. What I want to do throughout the week. It helps them figure out what works and what doesn't work for different types of classes. |
| Geometry 4, interview | Originally, she stated, "Implementing instructional strategies usually depends on how or when my co-teacher wants to implement the strategies into the classroom. I do, however, like to talk to students and my co-teacher to see if it worked and if we would use it again. When asked the interview question at the end of the study, she responded, "Well, I try to look at like without pinpoint a few of my students and see if I can implement with them. To begin with, and then if you see about something that works with them or doesn't, then we'll try something different. Usually, kind of a trial and error. I try to see if it, who it works with and how it worked with us (my SPED) kids." |

***Interview***

Interview questions were developed to solicit feedback on the changes collaboration has made on instructional practices. The interview question asked, "How do collaborative meetings impact your instructional practices?"

> 9th Grade Lit 1 agreed that "These meetings help us to create common assessments, adjust remediation, and analyze the data" in the first interview. She commented in the post interview, "For one thing, because of the way that we've looked at data we've been able to see in benchmarking areas of strengths for some teachers or other teachers and then in those collaborative meetings, we're able to discuss what those teachers are doing differently. Whether it is a piece of literature that might be more relevant for the students or have a Lexile level that is just more accessible or whatever it is, but in those meetings, we discuss all of those things so that then when you go back to your classroom, you are able to look at the practices that you've been doing and see really evaluate the

> effectiveness of them and be able to make any sort of adjustments or changes that you need based on what other teachers are doing. So it gives you a base to ask, Hey, propaganda did not work well for my students. What did you do with propaganda? I did this uh, were there any differences or changes in the way that you delivered the material over the course of this? One of the teachers in the meeting that we had saw that there was a lot more student led stuff that was happening in my classroom, so she tried to incorporate that more into her classroom to get more buy in from her students. So things like that, that are pedagogical strategies are introduced in the curriculum meeting and then use in our instructional practices."

Next, I asked all participants, "How do you implement instructional strategies after a professional learning day at RHS?"

> Biology 4 described a SPED professional learning day that was beneficial in the first interview. She stated, "Personally, the class that I go to collaborative for has been behind the other classes and we have used it to determine how we can better pace the class or if there are lessons we can streamline to focus on the meat of what needs to be learned." The second interview revealed a change in practices. She responded, "Well, we specify what we want to do and we do it for lack of better words. A lot of times, we talk about do we want to use this and is it hands on for the students? We implement based on what our students need. Some of our students need extra time to work on projects. We would have to have things already planned for them; such as cut out bugs for a project we just worked on. So things like that would planning together ahead of time helps us come up with strategies that the students are actually working on the content and not worrying about drawing or things like that we're able to help them."
>
> 9th Grade Lit 2 commented, "Information that we are given in PLs is taken back to collaborative meetings where we often discuss how to implement in our classrooms." When I met with her for the second interview, she stated, "First, I figure out if I don't if it's something that I'm trying to figure out if I can, especially if it's a computer program, I have to figure out how to play with it myself first, and then look at my standards, my curriculum and my pacing guide and say, Okay, what activities are we doing that we can start incorporating? And it may start like very small, it may be something that you can just jump right in with. It kind of just melts in perfectly together and then sometimes it's just a matter of tweaking little things in your daily lesson plans to be able to put their strategies into place."

**Interviews (Combined Research Questions 1 and 2)**

One interview question aligned with research questions two and three. The question asks, "What impact does common planning with your co-teacher or general education teacher have on

teacher learning?" Biology 1 participant responded quickly to this question. She said in both the pre and post interview that, "Co-teachers help me a lot because you don't always see everything or know everything. They're there to help you with struggling kids and help try other strategies." 9th Grade Lit 3 participant believes that, "If she did not have common planning with her teachers, it would be incredibly difficult to collaborate with them. There are small opportunities in class, but it is essential to have a structured meeting regularly with the sole purpose of reviewing past instruction and planning future instruction collaboratively." She added during the post interview that, "It (common planning) is essential for student learning. As far as the students being the learning, being conducive to student success, you have to be able to collaborate especially between a gen ed teacher and a special ed teacher. The gen ed teacher knows the content so much more typically than the SPED teacher may in collaboration or generally, they know more content than the SPED teacher. But, collaboration helps to bridge that gap and it's always better to have two content specialists or have both teachers knowing the same amount of content."

**Focus Group (Combined Research Questions 1 and 2)**

Two interview questions aligned with research questions one and two. Participants shared their responses to the question, "How do you collaborate with your co-teacher?"

> Geometry 3 stated, "So it's kind of like bouncing ideas off of each other. So like, she just said, um, you know what you're doing right? So they could say, well, this is going to be difficult. So let's scaffold this lesson about these set of children may have these misconceptions. So let's find a different way to approach this helps to differentiate instruction, the collaboration, like it brings in a different perspective. So you're not only looking at things from your perspective, you're having someone else who has the strategies and the light for students with disabilities that can also help the other children in the classroom. So I think the collaboration is very key because like, if you may be in terms of assessment. If you're thinking about putting a certain type of question on the assessment, we'll have it that other person there can say okay, this question may be a bit biased or not worded correctly for the SPED students."

> 9th Grade Lit 1, participant stated, "So, another thing that we will sometimes do is sometimes we have multiple classes where one of us can start teaching something in one class and then the other one can teach it in the next class. And we'll have different collaborative moments where we'll discuss like, Oh, I didn't think about how this is connected to this. Do you think we need more of this? Sometimes what you get out of the piece of literature is as varied as the person is who's reading it. So being able to incorporate that into the way that we collaborate together, has made each of each of my classes, get it a broader spectrum of material, and we'll go through that sometimes and be like, wait a second, what did you send them? That makes more sense than what I thought okay, and some correction back and forth and so forth."

> According to 9th Grade Lit 3, "I think that learning from my co teacher and being in collaborative plans not only with her but with other department members, like ELA department members and that may not teach with and have never taught with. I've learned a lot more about the standards and as a sped teacher standards, you know, it's not the thing that's in the forefront of your mind all the time. Sometimes you're just going from assignment to assignment or from task to task and trying to differentiate that, and it's given me given me a broader sense of, this is the standard that my students have to learn, especially because they're in the general education setting. This is what they have to learn. It's the same as gen ed students, but how can I make something especially with ELA being having writing standards and having Reading Informational standards, and Reading Literary standards, like they, it's just helped me understand the wording of standards more and how that applies to instruction and what we're teaching so that I can translate that to our students to try to get them to understand this is why we're learning this because I think it helps with sped students to be able to give them a bigger purpose or to say from the beginning, this is why this is what we're doing here. This is what we want to accomplish."

I continued the conversation by asking them, "How do teachers support or resist collaborative meetings?" This was a question that all participants responded passionately about collaboration.

> 9th Grade Lit 3 began the conversation by saying, "I think at first the pushback. The lack of embrace to it was that it appeared to be a little rigid. As far as this is what we're going to talk about. This is you know, there was an agenda and I think that it was an agenda that was definitely more specific, more targeted, had more things for you to specifically to talk about collaborate on and then kind of report back. But, I don't think seeing it in action, I don't think that that's a bad thing. And I think that the rest of the teachers would also agree with that, you know that there was pushback in the beginning because I was like, Oh my gosh, there's just so much of this to do and this is so laid out for me and decided upon before I meet about anything and I don't think that's the case now because I think we get better

results. Because of the way that it's structured can help what you know, like heavily it is structured."

Next, 9th Grade Lit 1 responded, "There have been initiatives that we've had in the past that have had very little follow through. And so I think a lot of the pushback early on had a lot to do with feeling that this would be one more hoops to jump through one more thing to check off somebody's list and not actually something that would be beneficial for curriculum. And I think that as we put it into practice, it's been very clear to all of the teachers and everyone that this is actually something that is targeted and focus in an excellent way that is all on the same page and having a clear idea of the direction that we're heading. And that this is something that there is follow through for that this isn't just one more initiative that someone on some level determined that we would need that would last more than a year or would last more than a semester or a couple of weeks into the semester and then now it's back to business as usual. Because it can often feel like there's no follow through."

Geometry 3 commented, "And I think some teachers there initially they were like okay, well we collaborate. We talked in passing, like we're bouncing ideas. Oh, I told them what I'm doing. They told me what they're doing and they thought it was enough. Well, now they see, like us sitting down having that structure like that was mentioned. You know, they're saying okay, I'm really getting some good ideas from this teacher. Okay, I'm seeing the same common misconceptions over here. Okay, this is data is showing us where we're weak as a whole. Right now they're really seeing the benefits of having that structure. That sit down conversation, where you're specifically targeting certain things, and it's providing them with more knowledge versus by staying in the past. Oh, I'm working on polynomials today. Well, we did polynomials last week. We're working on geometry, two different things, but not today. And so instead of just saying where we are, we're actually talking about how students are learning how we're going to address it. They're not learning. What are we doing, like what's taking place so they are more detailed conversations, and we are able to see the benefits more in the classroom, especially right when we have those data conversations, like in the math department. So I teach algebra one, and I teach geometry. Well, in algebra one we saw across algebra one. Students didn't do so well with adding and subtracting radicals. It wasn't just specifically in my classroom, it was all classrooms. So as of algebra one content for lack of better term, we know that we need to go back, reassess, and reteach first and then reassess that skill. Same day, the geometry we're seeing, okay, these tasks are not working here. Let's try something different over here. And so like different teachers, one teacher may be using handouts, one teacher may be doing hands on activities and having those conversations that's talking about specifically what we're doing and not where we are, you know, we're seeing better results in the classroom."

Biology 2 answered, "I would just say that for my department specifically. The pushback at initially was that this is going to be taking up valuable time that it

> was just like other hoops to jump through. But I think that the attitude has changed a little bit. The meetings aren't taking very long now that the agenda has been like streamlined, we can talk about specifically what we need to in each meeting. It's just that I think that again, I'm just speaking from my department. I'm not sure how everybody else's works, but we kind of get in well, we have been in the rut where we have what's going on in our classroom and it's we're just in our little world with whatever we're doing, whether we're teaching the same subject or not. So being able to actually have the structure to sit down and say, Alright, this is what I'm specifically doing. We still have some people that are as willing to share with or contribute to the planning process, but I think that is getting better and that we all can stay on the same pacing guide because that was another thing that we would do is that somebody would get a little bit of a good little bit ahead or a little bit behind and then for the rest of the year would be on two totally different subjects. And this is helping us kind of keep together and I guess focus on like specific tasks that we think work best and forget or leave the final ones that haven't worked."

> Lastly, 9th Grade Lit 1 added, "One more thing I would also like to say about it is I do think that it has decreased the amount of (informal conversation) because when you're just doing the hallway talking of well, I'm here, or there, there tends to be a lot of negativity about the kids not getting it and it's just that in general thing that you say, Man, I can't. My kids are not understanding this and know my kids too. But because it's so in passing, there isn't any sort of solution. That's mentioned. There's no sort of movement forward with any of it. There's no direct thing that you're discussing about what the kids aren't getting. It's just an in passing phrase that would happen when we have hallway collaboration, where it's now because of the way that the things are targeted. We're actually addressing those and finding solutions for that and moving forward with it. And so, I hear a lot less hallway conversation."

**Focus Group (Combined Research Questions 2 and 3)**

Focus group participants agreed that the interview question six, "How do weekly collaborative meetings impact instructional practices?" and interview question five "How do teachers support or resist collaborative meetings?" were seeking similar responses and were combined and can be located in the *Focus Group (Combined Research Questions 1 and 2).*

Focus groups conversations affirmed the need for the restructuring of the schedule to support collaborative planning. The responses reassured the selection of the participants. Each

participant provided input as I expected; however, some contributed more than others during the discussion.

## Collaborative Meetings

A foundational aspect of this study included the establishment of weekly collaborative meetings. Participants were asked to establish a weekly meeting time, location, and day for collaborative planning meetings to take place. I attended three collaborative meetings for each content area totaling nine observations during the eight week study. Each observation lasted 30 minutes. During the observations, I took field notes of what was seen and heard during the meetings. I paid close attention to the conversations in each meeting to get a better understanding of teacher needs for collaborative support and professional learning. According to Knight (2016), better conversations will improve collaboration, team meetings, professional learning communities, and other conversations about teaching and learning. The High Impact Practice Observation Tool: Collaborative Planning (HIPOT) was used to evaluate each of the three collaborative meetings. This observation tool was used to track how each departments collaborative meetings changed over the course of the study.

Participants followed an agenda designed to focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Appendix F). By using an agenda, a continuous focus and structure allowed participants to acknowledge others contributions and prior knowledge (Aguilar, 2016). For the duration of the study and observations, participants focused on the curriculum and instruction sections of the collaborative planning meetings. Curriculum and instruction discussions focused on DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2006) questions of engagement, “What we want our students to learn? How will we respond when some students do not learn? and How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient?” Guided questions were available for

participants to follow to streamline the process in all three academic areas. While the first collaborative meetings were not as productive, each academic group improved collaborative practices over the eight weeks.

**9th Grade Lit**

The three ninth grade participants met each Thursday at 2:30 p.m. During the first observation, I noticed that one participant, a veteran teacher, appeared to be the facilitator; however, she dominated the meeting by giving a variety of examples of activities and not giving other participants enough time to contribute to the conversations. Additionally, she would ask questions of the other participants without giving adequate time for responses. Roles and responsibilities were not established from the beginning with this group of participants. Overall, I observed that the team members worked well together and respected each other as a team. The participants seemed uncomfortable with the new collaborative structure based on their conversations. The use of an agenda to guide the conversation was not evident during the first observation. HIPOT data revealed that the ten "look fors" standards were not evident in the first observation (Table 8).

Participants established norms by the second observation, resulting in an evident rating on the HIPOT. Other ratings for the additional nine standards in the observation tool were rated as partially evident.

**Table 8**

*High Impact Practice Observation Tool (GADOE, 2018)*

| **9th Grade Literature** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Look Fors** | **Not Evident** | **Partially Evident** | **Evident** |
| Specific norms and protocols are evident. | | | X |
| Teachers anticipate student misconceptions (responses to instruction). | | X | |
| Teachers analyze the GSE to clarify what students are expected to know, understand, and do. | | X | |
| Teachers utilize Georgia DOE curriculum support documents. | | X | |
| Teachers create lesson plans that include clear, standards-based learning targets and define success criteria. | | X | |
| Teachers work together to build consensus on the selection and implementation of evidence-based strategies. | | X | |
| Teachers plan for all phases of the instructional framework. | | X | |
| Teachers plan for specific, daily formative assessment strategies. | | X | |
| Teachers focus on analyzing what is and is not working based on disaggregated assessment data and student work. | | X | |
| Teachers use data results to develop remediation and/or enrichment action plans that move students toward mastery of the standard. | | X | |

The facilitator realized from the first meeting that she was not allowing others to be an active part of the collaboration and reached out for guidance. Aguilar (2016) reminds us that our role as a facilitator is to spark the desire in others. As participants began to gain trust with each other, I observed an emotional connection with this group. They were enthusiastic about the conversations leading them to improved discussion about curriculum and instruction. The open discussions allowed them to gain trust and better guide them to improve instruction.

I observed the ninth grade Literature participants had fully embraced the newly established collaborative planning process by the third observation which improved their instructional practices. The participants were more energetic and able to identify areas of weakness to impact their decisions about curriculum and instruction.

**Geometry**

The four Geometry participants chose Friday mornings at 9:00 a.m. as their meeting time. The veteran teacher began the meeting by following the agenda and designating a timekeeper, recorder, and facilitator. As I observed the first meeting, I noticed the body language of this group was different than the other academic groups. One of the participants appeared uninterested in the discussion of the curriculum. The facilitator made a point to allow each participant to contribute to the conversation by calling on each person. However, the discussions were forced at first as the participants attempted to give their overview of the curriculum. I noted that the participant's conversations were more casual, and they were not as familiar with a formal setting for discussing curriculum and instruction. The HIPOT rubric ratings were scored as not evident for the first collaborative meeting with this group.

The second collaborative meeting was more productive, and all members were prepared to discuss lesson plans and share instructional materials with the group. HIPOT ratings moved from not evident to partially evident on half of the "look fors" (Table 9). The discussions in the meetings stayed focused on curriculum and participants shared instructional practices and areas of strengths and weakness. To my surprise, the participant who showed no interest in the first meeting was sharing positive experiences from the lessons and giving tips on what worked and did not work in the line and angle unit.

**Table 9**

*High Impact Practice Observation Tool (GADOE, 2018)*

| Geometry – Pre Observation | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Look Fors** | **Not Evident** | **Partially Evident** | **Evident** |
| Specific norms and protocols are evident. | | X | |
| Teachers anticipate student misconceptions (responses to instruction). | X | | |
| Teachers analyze the GSE to clarify what students are expected to know, understand, and do. | | X | |
| Teachers utilize Georgia DOE curriculum support documents. | | X | |
| Teachers create lesson plans that include clear, standards-based learning targets and define success criteria. | | X | |
| Teachers work together to build consensus on the selection and implementation of evidence-based strategies. | | X | |
| Teachers plan for all phases of the instructional framework. | X | | |
| Teachers plan for specific, daily formative assessment strategies. | X | | |
| Teachers focus on analyzing what is and is not working based on disaggregated assessment data and student work. | X | | |
| Teachers use data results to develop remediation and/or enrichment action plans that move students toward mastery of the standard. | X | | |

During the last observation, Geometry participants improved their approach to collaborative planning. The facilitator, Geometry participant 3, began the meeting by welcoming everyone to the meeting and reviewing the previous week's minutes. She then asked, "Where are we in our instruction?" Geometry participant 2 gave an explanation of proofs, and explained how he had to slow down with instruction. He continued by explaining how his students could not comprehend how to complete steps in algebraic problems. The facilitator gave a

recommendation of using an online game as a supplemental activity for the students. Next, Geometry participant 1 shared with the group that his students were not retaining content as the week(s) go on. He asked for any suggestions. Geometry participant 3 reiterated how important it was to review with students at the beginning of each block. She continued to share how her students were successful with the algebraic problems when she had students select their own activities to understand the concepts. According to Sharrett and Planche (2016), if the facilitator is knowledgeable of the content area under study, her impact can be considerably multiplied. In this meeting, the facilitator made two recommendations to incorporate technology and remediation when teaching algebraic concepts. Participants were receptive to these recommendations resulting in a positive collaborative outcome. This group mastered nine of the ten “look fors” on the HIPOT during this observation (Table 10).

**Table 10**

*High Impact Practice Observation Tool (GADOE, 2018)*

| Geometry – Post Observation | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Look Fors** | **Not Evident** | **Partially Evident** | **Evident** |
| Specific norms and protocols are evident. | | X | |
| Teachers anticipate student misconceptions (responses to instruction). | | X | |
| Teachers analyze the GSE to clarify what students are expected to know, understand, and do. | | X | |
| Teachers utilize Georgia DOE curriculum support documents. | | X | |
| Teachers create lesson plans that include clear, standards-based learning targets and define success criteria. | | X | |
| Teachers work together to build consensus on the selection and implementation of evidence-based strategies. | | X | |
| Teachers plan for all phases of the instructional framework. | | X | |
| Teachers plan for specific, daily formative assessment strategies. | | X | |
| Teachers focus on analyzing what is and is not working based on disaggregated assessment data and student work. | | X | |
| Teachers use data results to develop remediation and/or enrichment action plans that move students toward mastery of the standard. | X | | |

**Biology**

Biology collaborative planning meetings were scheduled for Thursday afternoons at 3:30 p.m. The overall structure of these meetings was similar in nature for all three observations. Each observation began with reviewing the pacing guide and lesson plans for the week. The facilitator was the primary communicator in these meetings. The other three participants would share their previous week and where they will be in the current week. All participants are knowledgeable of

the content and complied with expectations of completing required collaborative documentation; however I observed participants engaging in ritual compliance rather than authentic conversations.

## Professional Learning

Two professional learning sessions were designed during the study to focus on the restructuring of collaborative planning meetings and providing feedback on a specific curriculum and instruction instructional practice. The academic coach and I prepared the sessions to reflect four of Aguilar's (2016) big bucket reasons to have a PL meeting. This allowed the participants to understand sessions through modeled topics rather than a "sit and get" type of meeting. Additionally, Knowles (1984) four principals of adult learning were taken into consideration when scheduling professional learning during academic departmental planning times.

The first professional learning session, *PL: {RE}Defining Collaboration*, explored the purpose of collaboration, explained how to create norms, and described expectations for collaborative planning between content and special education teachers. A variety of resources were shared with the participants as a way to incorporate communication and participation in collaborative meetings, as well as in the classroom. Participants were expected to follow an agenda and respond to specific curriculum and instruction questions for accountability. This allowed continuity among all departments and ensured the relationship between adult learning and collaborative planning. To close the meeting, a video was shown to emphasize the importance of teamwork.

Based on collaborative planning minutes and observations, the academic coach and I designed a PL session over feedback, instructional practices, and assessment. We determined participants would benefit with a professional learning session that would allow them to select a

curriculum or instruction instructional practices and provide feedback during the next PL session. Aguilar (2016) states that effective feedback yields openings – in conversations, in reflection, and in relationships. She continues by saying conversations that begin as feedback can provide opportunity for growth. This would allow participants to feel more comfortable with communication among the group and allow them to increase their knowledge of curriculum and instruction through a teaching and learning practice. Participants used the online picker wheel to select curriculum or instruction topic. If the wheel stopped on curriculum, they watched a youtube video on success criteria. The participants implemented the success criteria and provide feedback to students. Participants who selected instruction were given an instructional strategies toolkit and choose one instructional strategy for the opening, work period, or closing of a lesson. The strategy chosen was implemented in at least one class and shared with the next PL session. Gabriel (2005) tells us to focus on professional development by utilizing the talent on our team by presenting at team meetings.

Participants were receptive to both professional learning sessions designed for collaborative planning meetings. I noticed at the beginning of the study that participation in the weekly collaborative meetings struggled with communication. Redefining collaboration based on Blanton and Perez (2011) major characteristics of professional learning community allowed the adult learners to be more involved in the planning and problem solving phase.

**Summary**

The qualitative case study was designed to gain teacher perspectives of collaborative practices. Eleven teachers agreed to proceed with the study and were participants during the interviews, observations, and focus group. Three research questions were used as a guide for this study and aligned to the interview questions. Conversations with the participants allowed me to

acquire a deeper understanding of how they perceived collaborative practices prior to the study and after the study. Teams implemented new collaborative structures to guide their conversations, goals, and outcomes. Findings revealed that past collaborative practices were not existent or lacked a structured format. The research also suggest that the newly structured collaborative practices have allowed participants to gain confidence in curriculum conversations to improve their instructional practices and further develop an understanding of how working together can be a valuable tool for collaboration.

# Chapter 5

## Discussion and Implications

Chapter 5 presents the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations of the study. Findings from the study on teacher perceptions of collaborative practices are summarized. I also describe in detail the limitations of the study, conclusions of each research question, and conclude with the implications and recommendations for future practice.

### Summary

Elana Aguilar, in *The Art of Coaching* Teams (2016), explains that in order to be effective, a strong team understands they must collaborate in order to generate outcomes. She defines collaboration as members sharing their experience and expertise in ways that enhance team productivity and development. Sharratt and Planche (2016) states the "purpose of an intentional learning structure is to provide a safe venue for co-constructing new knowledge, deepening shared understandings, making adjustments, and otherwise refining practice to improve the quality of teaching decisions and their impact on student learning" (p.146).

This qualitative case study examined teacher perspectives on collaborative practices in a rural high school setting. The study also examined how collaborative practices changed after implementing a structured protocol for collaborative planning. Eleven teachers actively participated in the study. The content areas included Biology, Geometry, and 9th Grade Literature. Participants were selected through stakeholder purposive sampling (Palys, 2008) from 38 high school academic and special education teachers. Data was collected through self-assessments, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and observations. Focus group participants were selected based on interview responses. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are SPED and general education teacher perceptions of collaboration at Rural High School?
2. How does the implementation of standard collaborative practices influence teacher collaboration?
3. According to teachers, how have their classroom instructional practices changed as a result of focused collaboration efforts?

Overall, the findings revealed that participants saw a change in collaborative practices over the eight week study. Participants discovered that by changing their process of collaboration to focus on improving instructional practices and increasing effective communication, collaborative meetings become more purposeful and meaningful.

## Conclusions

The research questions guided the structure of the study. Based on participants' responses to the research questions, I determined that structured protocols for collaboration were necessary to make improvements at RHS. Research has found that the structure of a protocol allows for deliberate discussion and reflection while eliminating extraneous discussions (Sharatt and Planche, 2016).

### Conclusions to Research Question One

What are SPED and general education teacher perspectives of collaboration at Rural High School? The purpose of this question was to understand how participants perceived collaboration before and after established protocols were implemented. All participants shared various experiences from previous and current collaborative meetings. At the beginning of the study, participants agreed that collaboration at RHS was not a primary focus. Participants admitted that one of the main ways they collaborated was in the hallway, at lunch, or even at the copier. No

formal protocols were shared with them during professional learning until this study. The end of the study revealed that participants more clearly defined collaboration as working together for common goals, a time to share resources, and more discussion about curriculum and the learning environment. All participants strongly agreed that collaboration improved over the course of the study with an increased frequency of formal communication and a stronger sense of trust among each group.

**Conclusions to Research Question Two**

How does the implementation of standard collaborative practices influence teacher collaboration? Through this question, I sought first to assess participants' perceptions of the importance of collaborative practices and their perceptions after standard practices were introduced via professional learning. Two professional learning sessions were developed to model appropriate structures for collaborative planning and then assign participants a task to implement and provide feedback. The second professional development session directly resulted from observations and minutes from planning sessions. This served to further the discussions around common instructional barriers and how participants addressed students' instructional needs. Through participants' responses, I discovered during the first interview that several participants were not sure if collaboration impacted their instructional practices or if the teachers involved had the same goal. Participants all explained that PL was scheduled twice a month on Tuesdays. Six participants gave examples of the professional development sessions that were not based on instructional practices. They mentioned that these were the most memorable, such as PBIS implementation. I realized that with these examples professional learning needed to be redesigned to impact further and guide the direction of the study. Throughout the study, participants adapted to the new collaborative structures, which allowed teachers to discuss new

skills or techniques to improve their practices. Connections were made in each group making discussions during the collaboration meetings consistent and authentic. These connections supported Poulos et al. (2014) research of teachers communicated to improve "pedagogical expertise." Participants were engaged during the professional learning sessions and collaborative meetings. The structure of RHS professional learning supported the research of Blanton and Perez (2011) stated earlier the six major characteristics of professional learning communities. Participants were supported through shared leadership, established open dialogue, a shared vision of collaboration, a supportive environment, and time for reflective practice.

**Conclusions Research Question Three**

According to teachers, how have their classroom instructional practices changed as a result of focused collaboration efforts? Research question three was designed for participants to reflect on their own practices. Knowles's (1984) four principles of andragogy correspond with the relationship between collaboration and adult learners. Participants evaluated their practices which allowed them to experience the improvements made in collaboration. Participants exhibited a willingness to change when they experienced support and were able to provide input on the structure of collaborative meetings. Participants provided feedback on how the agenda was organized as discussions were held regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Based on observations and interviews, participants embraced the newly structured collaborative planning and learned how to communicate with their colleagues as the study progressed. Each content area improved their collaborative process through the duration of the study. After analyzing the transcripts from the interviews and reviewing the field notes from the observations, the non- EOC, 9$^{th}$ Grade Lit and Geometry course exhibited a higher level of engagement and positive outlook towards collaboration. These teachers were enthusiastic about

learning new instructional practices, brought new ideas to the discussions each week, and allowed time for exploring new ways of designing instruction. In the Biology EOC course, participants' weekly meetings were significantly different than the non-EOC meetings. Biology structured their meetings to only discuss on how to answer the agenda topics and adjust assignments that had always been taught. They did not allow time to extend their conversation on how to improve instructional practices or ways to incorporate new strategies learned during the PL meetings. Their meetings fell short of adding depth to the conversations during collaborative planning meetings. Although they followed the new procedures put in place during the study, additional modeling should be implemented on how to further develop the conversation and ways to improve instructional practices.

Stronger relationships were evident between participants as they enhanced the conversations on instructional strategies and shared practices. Instructional leadership played a key role in the improvement of instructional practices through collaboration. Guided by previous research from Quinn (2002), Whitaker (1997) and Fiore (2000), my role as an instructional leader was to motivate and inspire, as well as ensure visibility throughout the meetings.

**Limitations**

As previously mentioned, the study encountered some anticipated limitations. One limitation that might have influenced the study outcome was the responses from the participants who were assigned under me as their TKES evaluator. The participants were provided with reassurance at the beginning of the study that all interviews and observations would not be part of their TKES ratings or evaluations.

Additional limitations arose throughout the study. First, the original focus group number of participants declined from five or six to four. Focus group participant responses to the

interview protocol questions were not as strong as anticipated due to the social studies teachers who declined to participate. Next, four observations were scheduled to take place during the study's time frame. Due to excessive teacher absences as a result of COVID sick leave, teachers were required to serve as substitute teachers in colleagues' classrooms. Due to these scheduling conflicts, observations and collaborative planning sessions were canceled for approximately one week. Finally, three participants were department chairs and served in a leadership capacity. Department members worked under the assumption that meetings should be facilitated by these established leaders rather than select a different facilitator or work through shared leadership. While shared responsibilities eventually became evident, collaborative conversations should allow all participants to be involved in the dialogue of collaboration.

**Implications**

Collaboration is necessary for improving instructional practices. Adult learning theory and leadership theory provided a structure and contributed to the design of the study. Focus group participants made several references of how the new collaborative experiences impacted the implementation in each department. Participants became more confident in their responses as discussions centered on curriculum and instruction. Participants noted that they began to see the benefits of the meetings each week through data analysis, curriculum conversations, and shared conversations around instructional practices. Collaborative meetings were designed to build trust, engage members in conversations around instruction, and develop a problem-solving environment. This aligns with research from Lynch (2012) on constructivism as members began to construct new knowledge based on these shared experiences.

## Recommendations

The study clearly showed that a structured protocol was needed to positively impact weekly collaborative meetings. Based on the outcomes of this study, three recommendations should be considered for further implementation or study.

### Recommendation #1: Academic Areas of Collaboration

The first recommendation would be to include all academic areas in a future study to fully assess collaboration's impact in a school wide setting. This global view would allow a researcher to develop professional learning based on the needs of all teachers and thereby impacting all areas of instruction.

### Recommendation #2: Allotted Time for Implementation

The following recommendation would be to implement the study at the beginning of the school year. Although the study began at the beginning of a new semester, participants had to restructure their collaborative practices mid-year. While this did not present any immediate problems, the timing could impact participants' willingness to commit fully. Future studies would benefit from establishing collaborative expectations at the beginning of the school year allowing a full year of study on collaborative practices. Additionally, time must be allotted in the master schedule for SPED and general education teachers to plan collaboratively. Collaborating with the SPED and general education teacher is essential in forming a positive working relationship.

### Recommendation #3: Professional Learning

Professional learning must be effective for teachers to embrace the purpose of the practice. Each PL meeting's key objectives and outcomes should be evident and shared with participants to ensure authentic engagement. Purposeful planning tailored to the needs of teachers is a

primary consideration when developing professional learning sessions. Instructional coaches should be involved in the process when designing support for teacher growth. Heineke and Polnick (2013) recommend that the principal help the instructional coach establish strategies for improvement and change in professional growth.

## Conclusion

This qualitative case study examined the perceptions of collaborative practices in a rural high school setting. This study allowed me to understand how teachers perceive collaboration and the importance of professional learning to improve instructional practices. The transition from the beginning of the study until the end highlighted the isolation of most of the participants. Many were unaware of the impact that structured conversations could have on day-to-day instruction. Many early conversations felt forced as participants were reluctant to engage. However, participants became comfortable with conversations as they were given opportunities to share strategies and further develop their professional relationships. I found that my initial curiosity about redesigning the master schedule was imperative for the success of collaborative planning. Data from the study reinforced the need for collaboration between SPED and general education teachers. Upon the conclusion of the study, data also indicated that participants' perceptions of collaboration were substantially altered in a positive direction. Participants need the continuous support of my role as administrator and the instructional coach to improve instructional practices through collaboration.

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## Appendix A

Participant Email (Introductory)

Date

Dear _____:

I hope your semester is off to a great start! I am inviting you to participate in my research that I am conducting as a doctoral student at Kennesaw State University.

My dissertation topic is to understand teacher perspectives on the collaborative process and improve teacher learning by promoting effective instructional practice through professional learning. I have selected you as a participant based on your teaching assignment in US History, Biology, 9th Grade Lit, or Geometry. These content areas are my primary focus of research. My goal is to explore teacher perceptions of collaboration at Rural High School and how a newly structured collaborative model influences teacher collaboration and perceptions.

I am excited to offer you an opportunity to volunteer to participate in my study. Your participation begins with signing the attached consent form. As a participant in this study, you will also complete pre and post interviews. Additionally, I will gather information about collaborative practices through classroom observations, as well as observations of your collaborative planning sessions. Some participants might also be selected for a focus group to further analyze and discuss teacher collaboration at CCHS.

If you choose to participate, please sign the form attached and return to me within 5 days of this email.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Leah Slimp
Assistant Principal

## Appendix B

Teacher Consent Form

**Title of Research Study:** Teacher Perception of Collaborative Practices in a Rural High School Setting: Case Study

**Researcher Information:** Leah Slimp, (229) 392-4520, leahcjohnston74@gmail.com

**Confidentiality**
Participation results will be confidential and not released to any individual without consent from the participant. All teacher names will not be revealed in any form in the final research report.

**Purpose of Study**
The purpose of this study is to examine teacher collaboration and how changing their practices can impact teacher learning in a high school setting. The high school master schedule at Crisp County High School lacked collaborative planning between SPED, and general education teachers resulting in the redesign of the scheduling structure to improve instruction through collaborative planning. This study will explore a new collaborative process through professional development and how it effectively impacts teacher collaborative practices.

**Benefits**
There are no direct benefits to you as a participant in the study. However, you may gain a better understanding of a structured collaborative protocol and how to improve instructional practices.

**Time Requirements**
The research will take place over the spring semester 2022. Interviews and collaborative planning observations will take place during planning time.

**Procedures Outline**
Fourteen SPED and general education teachers have been selected to participate in this study. General Education teachers were selected based on teaching assignments in US History, Biology, 9$^{th}$ Grade Lit, or Geometry with respective SPED teachers. Interviews, classroom and collaborative planning observations, and focus groups will take place during the course of the study. All interviews and focus groups will be recorded for transcription and deleted immediately after the project is completed.

**Signed Consent**
I agree and give my consent to participate in this study. I will provide open and honest feedback to the researcher and complete all necessary requirements for the study.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
Participant Name/Date

## Appendix C

## Interview Protocol - Pre

**Teaching Position:**

☼Sped Teacher ☼General Education Teacher

**Content:**

☼US History☼Biology☼9th Grade Lit☼Geometry

| Interview Protocol Question (PRE) | Research Question |
|---|---|
| Briefly explain your educational background: degrees, years teaching, content. | x |
| How long have you taught at RHS? | x |
| How would you define teacher collaboration from your past experiences? | 1 |
| How often have you planned collaboratively with your colleagues in the past and currently? | 1 |
| What topics are discussed in your departmental collaborative meetings? | 2 |
| How does collaborating with your colleagues benefit you as a teacher? | 1 |
| What impact does common planning with your co-teacher or general education teacher have on teacher learning? | 2, 3 |
| How do collaborative meetings impact your instructional practices? | 3 |
| How often do you participate in school-wide professional learning? | 2 |
| Can you describe your current professional learning days at RHS? | 2 |
| What is your perception of professional learning at RHS? | 1 |
| How do you implement instructional strategies after a professional learning day at RHS? | 3 |
| How would you describe your most rewarding professional learning experience at RHS? | 1 |

## Appendix D

## Interview Protocol - Post

**Teaching Position:**

☼Sped Teacher ☼General Education Teacher

**Content:**

☼US History☼Biology☼9th Grade Li t☼Geometry

| Interview Protocol Question (POST) | Research Question |
|---|---|
| How would you define teacher collaboration? | 1 |
| How does collaborating with your colleagues benefit you as a teacher? | 1 |
| How often have you planned collaboratively with your colleagues in the past and currently? | 1 |
| What topics are discussed in your departmental collaborative meetings? | 2 |
| What impact does common planning with your co-teacher or general education teacher have on teacher learning? | 2, 3 |
| How do collaborative meetings impact your instructional practices? | 3 |
| How often do you participate in school-wide professional learning? | 2 |
| Can you describe your current professional learning days at RHS? | 2 |
| What is your perception of professional learning at RHS? | 1 |
| How do you implement instructional strategies after a professional learning day at RHS? | 3 |
| How would you describe your most rewarding professional learning experience at RHS? | 1 |

## Appendix E

## Focus Group Protocol

| Focus Group Protocol Question | Research Question |
|---|---|
| How has the redesigned master schedule impacted SPED and general education teachers' use of common planning, and how is the teacher learning supported through common planning? | 2 |
| How do you collaborate with your co-teacher? | 1, 2 |
| Describe the challenges you face in collaborating with your co-teacher and other content area teachers. | 2 |
| Can you share some advantages and disadvantages of collaboration? | 1 |
| How do teachers support or resist collaborative meetings? | 1, 2 |
| How do weekly collaborative meetings impact instructional practices? | 2, 3 |

# Appendix F

## Collaborative Planning Agenda

**RHS Collaborative Planning**
**Meeting Agenda & Minutes**
*Content Name*
*Date*
**Team Norms**

1. Start/End on Time.
2. Select a timekeeper and recorder.
3. Stay focused on teaching and learning.
4. All members come prepared to share lessons in a timely manner. One person does not dominate the discussion.
5. Plan an agenda for the next meeting.

**Attendance:**

**Type of Meeting:**
___Curriculum/Instruction Focus
____ Data Focus
____ Assessment construction

**Curriculum:** *What do we want our students to learn?*

1. Lesson/unit/pacing revisions and updates- any changes needed?
2. Standards/Concepts/ Learning Target Skills/Topics?

**Instruction:** *How will we respond when some students do not learn?*
*How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient?*

3. Technology, Materials, Resources to be utilized?
4. Student discussion- students meeting/not meeting/exceeding expectations? What are we doing?
5. Identify tasks or assessments to assess Learning Target Skills or Concepts.

**Assessment:** *How will we know if they learn it?*
6. Data analysis- benchmarks (pre, 4.5, 9 wk, 13.5, or Post) or Common Formative?
*Complete as a group- identify commonalities and differences between classes.*

| |
|---|
| 1. Item Analysis- What can we learn from the item analysis? |
| 2. Student analysis- Describe your students' levels of mastery & remediation. |
| 3. Student analysis- Describe your students' by subgroup. What are the implications for instruction going forward? |
| 4. Tracker Analysis- How do your classes compare? Which data surprised you? Which data did you expect? |
| 5. Teacher Comparison- How do different teachers compare? What instructional strategies can you share that have been successful? |
| 6. How will you modify your instruction based on this analysis of your data? |

7. **Benchmark-** Assessment Building (discussion focused around assessment construction). Record comprehensive notes based on your discussion around building a common assessment.

# Appendix G

## Collaborative Planning Self-Assessment

**Collaborative Planning Self-Assessment**

**Think about collaborative planning within your school or team. Choose a rating that best describes the current level of practice. You can think of the '– or +' in terms of 'no or yes, not okay or okay, not regularly or regularly'. Additional space is provided for you to make notes for yourself. Consider using this information to identify priorities for improving the quality of collaborative planning.**

| Collaborative Planning Best Practices | Rating | | Additional Thoughts |
|---|---|---|---|
| | - | + | |
| Plans a variety of formal and informal assessments aligned with instructional results to reassure student mastery of elements of standards. | | | |
| Uses diagnostic assessment data to develop learning goals for students, to differentiate instruction, and to document learning. | | | |
| Collaborates with others to develop or identify varying types of assessments (pre/post, common, benchmark) | | | |
| Aligns student assessment with established curriculum and benchmarks. | | | |
| Develops or enhances an accurate, deep and current knowledge of subject matter. | | | |
| Develops or enhances pedagogical skills relevant to subject area taught and best practice based on current research | | | |
| Plans to link present content with past and future learning experiences, other subject areas, and real-world experiences and applications. | | | |
| Plans learning targets to reflect high expectations for all students and a clear understanding of the curriculum. | | | |
| Analyzes and uses student learning data to inform planning. | | | |
| Develops plans that are clear, logical, sequential, and integrated across the curriculum. | | | |
| Plans instruction effectively for content mastery, pacing and transitions. | | | |
| Plans for instruction to meet the needs of all students. | | | |
| Plans to align and connect learning targets to approved curricula and standards, and student learning needs. | | | |
| Develops appropriate course, unit, and daily plans, and prepares to adapt plans when needed. | | | |
| Plans to develop higher-order thinking through questioning and problem-solving activities. | | | |
| Review curriculum and preview upcoming units/lessons. | | | |
| Plans to engage students in authentic learning by providing real-life examples and interdisciplinary connections. | | | |
| Plans instructional content, process, product, and learning environment to meet individual developmental needs. | | | |
| Plans for remediation, enrichment, and acceleration to further student learning of learning targets. | | | |
| Plans flexible grouping strategies to encourage appropriate peer interaction and to accommodate learning needs/goals. | | | |
| Maps out curriculum scope and sequence. | | | |
| Shares best practices, resources, and lessons. | | | |
| Analyzes student work to identify strengths and areas of need. | | | |
| Discusses effectiveness of lessons – what worked, what did not? | | | |
| Plans academic interventions for targeted groups of students. | | | |
| Plans transitional and graduation plans for identified students. | | | |
| Analyzes data from common assessments and benchmark assessments. | | | |

## Collaborative Planning Self-Assessment

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Celebrates best practices observed during peer observations. | | | |
| Co-plans with co-teacher to determine roles and responsibilities of each teacher for upcoming lessons. | | | |
| Regularly shares collaborative planning work for departments/grade levels with the leadership team | | | |
| Develops unit plans. | | | |
| Develops lesson plans. | | | |
| Develops pacing guides or maps. | | | |
| Analyzes summative student data. | | | |
| Uses data to progress monitor targeted students. | | | |
| Plans to support alternative program and homebound students. | | | |
| Uses data to determine effectiveness of interventions. | | | |
| Previews and selects performance tasks for each unit of study. | | | |
| Discusses shared readings about research-based best practices. | | | |
| Uses data to adjust instructional practices. | | | |
| Conducts peer observations to look for implementation of best practices. | | | |
| Reviews assessments to improve alignment with standards and increase rigor of assessment items. | | | |
| Develops action plans based on assessment results. | | | |
| Assesses progress periodically toward meeting department/grade level/school goals. | | | |
| Develops and monitors tasks/action plans related to the School Improvement Plan. | | | |
| All necessary persons participate including resource/special education teachers. | | | |
| Administrators attend meetings regularly. | | | |
| Entire sessions are dedicated to curriculum/instructional planning. | | | |
| Agendas are developed and minutes are recorded and shared. | | | |
| Meetings occur at regularly scheduled times. | | | |
| Meeting facilitators insure that the agenda is followed. | | | |

Sources:
GaDOE Teacher Assessment of Performance Standards Reference Sheet
GaDOE SIG Priority and NonSIG Priority Implementation of Indicators Guidance
SW Region Team Observations
Developed for 9.25.14 SW SI Region PL Network

# Appendix H

## High Impact Practice Observation Tool: Collaborative Planning

**High Impact Practice Observation Tool: Collaborative Planning**

| Look Fors | Not Evident | Partially Evident | Evident | Noted Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Specific norms and protocols are evident. **(Team Leadership)** | | | | |
| 2. Teachers anticipate student misconceptions (responses to instruction). **(Reflective Practices)** | | | | |
| 3. Teachers analyze the GSE to clarify what students are expected to know, understand, and do. **(SBI Planning)** | | | | |
| 4. Teachers utilize Georgia DOE curriculum support documents (GaDOE Frameworks, Achievement Level Descriptors, Assessment Guides, and Teacher Notes.) **(SBI Planning)** | | | | |
| 5. Teachers create lesson plans that include clear, standards-based learning targets and define success criteria (student work, exemplars, rubrics.) **(Lesson Plans)** | | | | |
| 6. Teachers work together to build consensus on the selection and implementation of evidence-based strategies. **(Lesson Plans)** | | | | |
| 7. Teachers plan for all phases of the instructional framework (opening, modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and closing.) **(Lesson Plans)** | | | | |
| 8. Teachers plan for specific, daily formative assessment strategies (checking for understanding.) **(Assessment)** | | | | |
| 9. Teachers focus on analyzing what is and is not working based on disaggregated assessment data and student work. **(Assessment)** | | | | |
| 10. Teachers use data results to develop remediation and/or enrichment action plans that move students toward mastery of the standard. **(Assessment)** | | | | |

# High Impact Practice Implementation Rubric: Collaborative Planning

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ADVANCING LEADERSHIP | TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS

| | Exemplary | Operational | Emerging | Not Evident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Team Leadership and Facilitation** | A team nominated teacher leader fosters discussions that are analytic, reflective and results-oriented.<br>GSCI - **Effective Leadership** – Cultivating and distributing leadership; TKES 1, 9, 10<br><br>The team establishes collegial norms, and a productive, improvement-oriented culture, including giving and receiving peer feedback.<br>GSCI – **Effective Leadership** - Creating and maintaining a school climate and culture conducive to learning, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration; TKES 1, 9, 10 | A designated team leader (coach/ teacher) has been established and explicit norms and protocols developed.<br><br>Teachers understand that working together interdependently towards a common goal will improve teaching practices and student achievement. | Leadership is not clearly established amongst the team.<br><br>Teachers meet to engage in collaborative planning. However, the process that is used is inconsistent and/or does not follow a specific protocol. | No evidence of leadership, protocols or norms within the group.<br><br>Most teachers prefer to work in isolation and do not understand how their collaborative efforts will impact teaching and student learning. |
| **Reflective Teaching Practices** | Teachers are reflective within their discussions about teaching practices connected to student learning gaps related to the content standards.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Refining the Instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration; TKES 1, 2, 3, 9, 10<br><br>Teachers anticipate student responses to instruction.<br>• What misconceptions are likely, and what can we do to prevent or minimize these misconceptions?<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Refining the Instructional system, **Effective Leadership** - Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration; TKES 1, 2, 3, 4<br><br>Teachers engage in deep, collective inquiry and shared responsibility for enabling students to master standards.<br>• What specific objectives must students achieve to master this standard?<br>• How can we present concepts so that students see | Teachers are reflective within their discussions about teaching practices connected to student learning gaps.<br><br>Reflection Questions (Danielson):<br>• What worked in this lesson? How do I know?<br>• What would I do the same or differently if I could reteach this lesson? Why?<br>• What root cause might be prompting or perpetuating this student behavior?<br>• What do I believe about how students learn? How does this belief influence my instruction?<br>• What data do I need to make an informed decision about this problem? | Teachers participate in limited discussions about teaching practices with partial connection to student learning gaps. | Teachers lack understanding of student learning gaps. |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Reflective Teaching Practices** (Continued) | connections with their background and prior knowledge?<br>• What vocabulary must students know and understand to discuss this concept comfortably?<br>GSCI **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration; TKES 1, 2, 9, 10 | • Is this the most efficient way to accomplish this task?<br><br>Some evidence of anticipation of student responses to instruction. | | |
| **Standards-Based Instructional Planning** | Teachers deeply discuss Georgia Standards of Excellence, resulting in prioritized content standards, in order to create pacing guides and curriculum documents.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration; TKES 1, 2, 5, 9, 10<br><br>Analysis of standards lead to the identification of teacher misconceptions, resulting in research and content knowledge development, and clarification of what students are expected to know, understand, and do.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration; TKES 1, 9, 10<br><br>Teachers identify end of unit and quarterly student learning targets, create standards-based common assessments, utilizing unpacked Georgia Standards of Excellence, and ensure student learning targets clearly align to prioritized standards.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction | Teachers analyze the Georgia Standards of Excellence to determine the intent of the standards and clarify what students are expected to know, understand, and do.<br><br>Teachers embed the Georgia Standards of Excellence in the creation of pacing guides and curriculum documents.<br><br>Teachers analyze and agree upon student learning targets and assessments for unit and quarterly standards prior to instruction. | Teachers embed the Georgia Standards of Excellence in the creation of curriculum documents and performance tasks.<br><br>Teachers discuss student learning targets for unit or quarterly standards prior to instruction. | Teachers depend solely on textbooks or performance tasks that may or may not be aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence.<br><br>Teachers may discuss student learning targets for unit or quarterly standards. |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Standards-Based Instructional Planning** (Continued) | in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration; TKES 1, 2, 5, 9, 10<br><br>Action plans are proactively developed to support at-risk students and students in need of enrichment.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Monitoring student progress, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration, **Supportive Learning Environment** – Developing and monitoring a multi-tiered system of supports; TKES 1 - 10 | | | |
| **Lesson Plans** | Lesson plans are aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence, developed collaboratively based on common student assessment data, and includes clear learning targets involving a high level of rigor as aligned to the standards.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration; TKES 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10<br><br>Real-world connections, vocabulary development, differentiated instructional strategies, teacher and student technology integration, opportunities for guided and independent practice *(I do, we do, you do)*, the use of multiple resources, and higher-level questioning are embedded throughout the lesson.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom; TKES 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 | Lesson plans are aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence, developed collaboratively, and includes clear learning targets within an instructional framework.<br><br>Assessments align to the learning targets.<br><br>Vocabulary development, differentiated instructional strategies, technology integration, and opportunities for guided and independent practice (*I do, we do, you do)* are embedded into the lesson plans. | Teachers create lesson plans that may be aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence, incorporating the instructional framework.<br><br>A common lesson plan protocol is evident.<br><br>Although the components of a good lesson plan may be present, there is little evidence of collaboration in the development of the lesson plans *(i.e. teacher's jigsaw lesson components or contents)*. | Teachers talk about ideas for lesson plans that are not clearly aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence.<br><br>A common lesson plan format has not been established or implemented. |

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| | Exemplary | Operational | Emerging | Not Evident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assessment and Evidence of Student Learning** | Teachers use a balanced system of common diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments aligned with the rigor of the Georgia Standards of Excellence.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Monitoring student progress, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration; TKES 1, 2, 5, 6, 8<br><br>Teachers focus on analyzing what is and is not working based on disaggregated assessment data and student work, and develop remediation/enrichment action plans to meet student needs.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Monitoring student progress, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration, **Supportive Learning Environment** – Developing and monitoring a multi-tiered system of supports; TKES 1, 2, 4, 6, 8<br><br>Teachers analyze diagnostic assessments at the item level to assess students' background knowledge and skills, determine learning targets, anticipate student progress and adjust instruction.<br>GSCI – **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Monitoring student progress, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration, **Supportive Learning Environment** – Developing and monitoring a multi-tiered system of supports; TKES 1, 2, 6 | Teachers use common formative and summative assessments, aligned with the Georgia Standards of Excellence, to determine student learning targets, monitor student progress, inform instruction, and improve teacher practices.<br><br>Teachers focus on analyzing what is and is not working based on aggregated assessment data and student work, and develop remediation/enrichment action plans to meet student needs.<br><br>Teachers provide standards-based feedback to students regarding progression of achievement towards learning targets. | Teachers use formative and/or summative assessments to monitor student progress.<br><br>Teachers share assessment data results. Assessment data may or may not be utilized to guide instructional plans.<br><br>Teachers may provide feedback to students regarding their work. | Teachers use assessments. However, neither assessment data nor student work are utilized to guide instructional planning. |

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| | Exemplary | Operational | Emerging | Not Evident |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Assessment and Evidence of Student Learning** (Continued) | Teachers analyze formative assessments at the item level to monitor student progress, inform instruction, and improve teacher practices.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Monitoring student progress, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration, **Supportive Learning Environment** – Developing and monitoring a multi-tiered system of supports; TKES 1, 2, 6<br><br>Teachers analyze summative assessments at the item level to determine mastery of standards, implement remediation, and improve teacher practices.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Monitoring student progress, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration, **Supportive Learning Environment** – Developing and monitoring a multi-tiered system of supports; TKES 1, 2, 4, 6<br><br>Teachers provide standards-based feedback to students regarding progression of achievement towards learning targets.<br>GSCI - **Coherent Instructional System** – Planning for quality instruction, Delivering quality instruction, Monitoring student progress, Refining the instructional system, **Effective Leadership** – Ensuring high quality instruction in every classroom, **Professional Capacity** – Ensuring staff collaboration; TKES 1, 2, 6, 10 | | | |