Informal School Based Teacher Development

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was a research-based inquiry into informal school based teacher development practices. The research question is: What do teachers talk about in the staffroom? Qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to gather data. Teachers from a school board in Ontario, Canada were surveyed on the topic of staffroom conversations. A total of 89 surveys were sent to teachers at 8 different elementary schools within the Pleasant Board of Education, and 47 were returned. The response rate for this survey was 53%. Most teacher discussion is professional communication dialogue. This study concludes with a series of recommendations.

Keywords: Staffroom, Teacher education, Professional development, Teacher development.

1. Introduction

Many people both educators and non-educators often wonder if informal teacher education occurs in the staffroom. Effective staffroom dialogue may have impact and influence the standards and attitudes of educators and administration. Some teachers may often loose rank among their peers if they cannot maintain their stature within the staffroom (Nias, 1989). Yet in avoiding the staffroom in preference of seclusion, teachers may become the object of gossip (Rosenholz, 1989).

This article examines the topics of conversation in the staffrooms of elementary schools and their potential impact on teacher development. Conversations can be categorized into three themes of professional communication, gossip and grumblings,

and friendship and family. Professional communication consists of conversations which relate to school based concerns or the sharing of know-how. Gossip and grumblings refer to those discussions pertaining to news about individuals, groups, and ventilation. Friendship and family are those conversations varying from small talk (e.g., sports, weather) to more private conversations (e.g., emotional support). It should be noted that healthy, constant staffroom conversations remind us that the staffroom needs to be considered as a safe haven for educators which contributes to a productive workplace.

Over the past 40 years researchers have examined and argued components of the staffroom and teacher interaction. Many studies have sought to demonstrate facets of staffroom dialogue or the role of the staffroom within the school setting; however, a researcher has yet to focus on informal teacher education in the staffroom. Interactive professionalism in education is a crucial element to social and political acumen. This study advocates that recognizing the significance of staffroom conversations to existing and prospective educators as an instructional method may enhance an individual's praxis.

2. Literature Review

There is a paucity of information dealing with teacher development through staffroom discourse in the popular literature. Nias (1989) found that where there is very little interaction among staff members and a teacher's classroom performance is directly impacted by what other staff say and do in the workplace. Nias noted that experienced teachers function as role models and give advice to beginning teachers in the forms of guidance and assistance, such as emotional support. Nias asserts that not even the most experienced teachers are unaffected by the problems associated with the teaching profession. Teachers rely on each other to socialize because they spend the majority of the instructional day with children. Nias concluded that teachers' staffrooms should be reassuring, psychologically relaxing and inviting. Teachers struggle for identity or status and rely on praise and recognition from their colleagues. The staffroom functions as a reference point for teachers to develop their overall sense of personal and professional identity and to understand the culture of the school.

Kianan (1997) in a qualitative study insists that work stories can be examined to ascertain teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards work. Based on a previous study of staffrooms in 1994, Kainan assumed that these stories dealt with teacher interaction on a daily basis, including teacher to teacher and teacher to administrator relationships. However, once all the data was gathered Kainan discovered that hardly any of the stories dealt with the topic of interpersonal relations. Kainan notes that almost all the stories collected dealt with the topics of family and home matters. Woods (1984) discussed the school staffroom's most common feature, laughter. Woods notes that laughter is central to a healthy staff and school. Woods found that laughter was inhibited at specific times during the year (e.g., report card time) and

laughter could be inhibited by teachers using insults or because of altercations between teachers or with principals. Rosenholtz (1989), like Nias, studied the school as a workplace. Rosenholtz's findings classified teacher discussions thematically as gossip. Staff gossip about other teachers Rosenholtz describes as "collegial talk about troubled teachers" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 94). Teachers who do not feel supported by administrators or colleagues become isolated from the social framework of the school.

Ben-Peretz and Schonmann (2000) classify staffroom discussion into four categories: gossiping, obtuseness, small talk, and ventilation. They compare the staffroom to a "family room" and within this type of family there exist different modes of communication, such as fights, intimate talks, advice, and so on. Ben-Peretz and Schomann use metaphor and monologue to state what they believe a staffroom and its conversations to be a multifunctional place. Hanmersley (1984) as noted in Ben-Peretz and Schomann (2000) examined the culture of teacher talk in staffrooms. According to Hanmersley (1984) "staffroom news" is a method that teachers use to keep one another current on students in the classroom. Many staffrooms have a clique or family compact culture, which often can lead to unpleasantness or conflicts with those who do not fit in. For example, Ben-Peretz and Schomann (2000) note that if a new teacher sits in an open chair to which a member of the clique claims ownership, the new teacher may be made to feel uncomfortable (p.30) or even be told to leave that chair. Similarly, teachers who do not adhere to certain norms or routines can become social outcasts or ostracized. Ben-Peretz and Schomann further describe the concept of "social cohesion" in the staffroom. They argue that it is important for pre-service and novice teachers to understand, that to be considered a good coworker by their colleagues is as important as it is to be considered a successful teacher in the classroom. Teachers must be prepared to interact with their peers to build a rapport and avoid being an outsider.

Fullan and Hargreaves (1996) suggest that teachers are aware of the climate within the staffroom and are sensitive to positive and negative relationships developed in the staffroom. The development of subgroups among teachers was documented by Hargreaves and Hestor in 1975. Based on their previous studies and personal experience Fullan and Hargreaves investigated the staffroom as a separate phenomenon in schools. Previously, Fullan (1995) emphasized that staffrooms provide opportunities for others to work with and learn from others on a continuous basis. For example, "continuous learning must be organically part and parcel of the culture of the school" (Fullan, p. 258). Fullan and Hargreaves assert that the staffroom is a haven for interactive professionalism which calls for opportunities to exercise judgment over issues of curriculum and teaching and to engage in the moral and social purposes of education.

Within the sources, both qualitative and quantitative, many themes related to what teachers talk about in the staffroom have been presented. The themes of professional

communication, gossip and grumblings, and friendship and family issues formed the basis for the background to this study.

3. Methodology

To examine these themes it was necessary to survey elementary teachers as to their conversational experiences in the elementary school staffroom and whether they had been impacted by negative staffroom conversation. In this research study a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative techniques were employed. The quantitative component was the creation and dissemination of surveys to 8 different elementary schools within the same Ontario school board. A total of 18 elementary schools were surveyed; however, only 8 schools agreed to participate in the survey. This can be attributed to the high level of principal autonomy at the individual schools. The director of education in the board surveyed agreed to participate in this research study as long as the principal at each school permitted the survey to be conducted. Unfortunately, many of the principals declined the opportunity to participate in this study. This sample of convenience of teachers afforded a range of opinions. The second method of investigation was the in-depth teacher interview. A total of 12 teachers voluntarily agreed and were interviewed for this study based on their informal knowledge of staffrooms. An in-depth interview gathers data of participant meanings.   According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001) the individuals interviewed made sense of their environment through answering open-ended questions. Similarly with observations, several interview formats were examined for this study: first, an informal conversation interview which has no predetermined format and questions are random; second, the guided interview approach which the researcher selects interview topics before the interview and the wording and order of questioning occurs during the interview; and finally, the standardized open-ended interview in which all the wording and question order are predetermined. For the purpose of this thesis the guided interview approach was used because of its ease of use. Further, the interviewer was also a teacher and had the advantage of knowing the interviewees prior to the interviews.

The 12 teachers selected for interviews were selected based on their informal knowledge of staffrooms. Their answers in the interview were probed and prompted to gain further insight into their experiences in the staffroom. The teachers, once asked, voluntarily agreed to participate in this research. All were requested to sign a consent form and were informed that they could withdraw from the interview at any time if they wished. They were also assured that their interviews would remain anonymous. For the purpose of this study they were given pseudonyms.

4. Results

The survey data was collected and analyzed using the SPSS computer program. A total of 89 surveys were sent to teachers at eight different elementary schools within

the Board of Education, and 47 were returned. The return rate for this survey was 53%. The sample of convenience represented a variety of teaching assignments (primary, junior, and intermediate) as well as years of teaching experience. The majority of teachers surveyed had attained a Bachelor of Education degree (B.Ed.); 81%, while 11% possessed a Master's degree (M.Ed., M.A., M.Sc.). No participants in the survey held a Doctoral degree. The largest group of teachers who participated in the survey were those between 26 and 30 years of age at 21.3%, while those in the 46-50 years of age category represented the second largest group of respondents at 19.1%. The mean number of years of teaching experience was 12.53 (SD=9.4). The total years of individual teaching experience were between 0 and 38 years. Both females (61.7%) and males (38.3%) took part in the study. Of those who participated in the survey, the largest group were those teachers at the intermediate level (grade 7 & 8) at 59.6%. Primary teachers (kindergarten to grade 3) represented 38.3% of the respondents, while junior teachers (grades 4, 5 and 6) represented 31.9%. The survey queried participants as to the frequency of topics in staffroom conversations using a Likert-type scale of values. Participants were asked to respond to the topics of Professional Communication, Gossip, Grumblings, Friendship, Family, and Other using a frequency scale of 5 being very frequent and 1 being not at all. The survey data gathered established that professional communication is the most frequent of all topics discussed in the staffroom. Seventeen percent of teachers surveyed indicated "Grumblings" was the second highest, followed by "Gossip" at 11% of those considered to be very frequent. Although the topic of family was representative of 6.4% of topics in the very frequent category, it was the highest frequent topic at 45%. It should be noted that Professional Communication represented 32% of responses in the frequent category, second only to the topic of Family at 45%.

The survey also recorded teacher responses regarding the impact of discussions in the staffroom. Teachers responded to questions using an impact rating scale ranging from no impact to great impact. The highest frequency response was "improving interpersonal communication among staff" with a great impact rating of 11%, followed closely by "improving workplace morale" at 9% and "discussion of individual pupils" at 9%. It is important to note that "improving workplace morale" represented the highest portion of responses in "considerable impact" at 43%. However, the most significant data are those of the "discussion of individual pupils" in "considerable impact" at 34% and 40% in "some impact". Not surprising, 32% of responses showed "improving communication between administration and teachers" as having "very little impact". As the data is analyzed, it becomes apparent that there is a link between the high frequency of Professional Communication in staffroom conversations and the discourse of individual pupils. Within this study there is a statistical correlation that is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) between the discussion of professional issues and the discussion of collaborative educational activities (r xy = .588).

Statistically, the questions asked by this study were correct when compared with the data presented on the frequency of topics in staffroom discussions. It can be suggested, based on the data gathered, that teachers discuss students and other elements of professional development more often than other topics. The importance of this frequency becomes apparent when we examine the qualitative data. A high level of "collective stocktaking" regarding students among teachers in the staffroom was stated by many teachers during the interviews.

Initially 15 teachers were approached, and 12 agreed to participate in interviews for this research study from the same Ontario school board. Each interview was tape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim immediately or as soon as possible following the completion of the interview. Each participant was informed through a letter of consent as to the risks to anonymity, as someone who was known to the interviewee could perhaps recognize his or her responses, although none chose to decline. Once the interviews were transcribed, they were categorized into a three-column graphic table organizer based on the following criteria: most frequent themes, major staffroom activities, and by-products.

Table: Organizer of Interview Responses

Most frequent themes	Major staffroom activities	By-products
Professional development: discussing students, strategies, exchanging ideas	Eating, drinking, interacting with other adults	Staffroom mood/conversation is more guarded when administration present
Grumbling/venting	Chatting	Happy school culture means happy staffroom
Gossip/rumours	Collecting mail	Humour, joking
Family: spouse, children	Educational schedules	Status, hierarchy of subgroups claiming seats/chairs
Friendship: hockey, TV, frivolous chit-chat	Relaxation/release Stress - get away/lottery pool Use telephone Meet with nonteaching staff	Nonteaching staff contribute to conversations

The organizer of interview responses table allows for an examination of the interview data based on themes and activities and their by-products. In addition, this table also provided a direct parallel to be made between both the quantitative and qualitative data. For example, both forms of data collection indicate that professional communication was the most frequent topic of discussion.

The first teacher interviewed was Matilda. She teaches at the intermediate level in an inner-city school. The school has a variety of high-needs children, and many have a low socioeconomic home life. Matilda is an experienced teacher who frequents the staffroom more than 10 times per week. She uses the staffroom for eating and chatting with other adults. She also collects her mail and views educational materials

and posted schedules in the staffroom. Matilda noted that staffroom conversations were important because they "reinforce what you are doing." She views the staffroom as a place to "try to work things out whether it is personal, client/child centered, or curriculum or activity centered." She perceives staffroom conversations as a mixture of topics; however, she feels that the sharing of ideas or materials impacts on her teaching practice.

Andy was the second participant in the interview process. He was canvassed because of his range and years of experience. Andy teaches at an inner-city elementary school at the intermediate level. Andy's students come from a lower socioeconomic background. Andy frequents the staffroom more than 10 times per week. He uses the staffroom for lunch and other snacks. Andy also collects his mail in the staffroom. He feels that staffroom conversations are important because they allow teachers a place to escape to interact with other adults. Andy believes that staffroom discussions are frivolous; however, he notes that the conversations that have an impact on his teaching practice are those that "if I hear something about a student that is having difficulties or something like that, then it would have an impact."

The third teacher interviewed was Ben. He is an intermediate teacher at an inner-city elementary school with high-needs students. Ben visits the staffroom fewer than 10 times per week; however, he frequents the staffroom more on specific days, such as on Fridays. Ben uses the staffroom to participate in the lottery pool, eating, chatting, and to use the telephone. He believes that staffroom discussions are important because they allow for venting or grumbling. Although Ben does not perceive the content of the staffroom conversation to be important, he does view the subgroupings within the staffroom to impact on teachers. For example, "for some it's a social thing or a status thing." Ben noted that he had not heard a great deal of conversation related to personal issues; however, he did hear "mostly professional things being talked about, so I would say it's the students and school topics certainly are there; it's all more or less business."

The next teacher interviewed was Kristen. She teaches in a small, rural school in the primary and junior divisions with students who tend to have a low socioeconomic background. She was selected because she was informally observed to frequent the staffroom. During the interview she confirmed that she visits the staffroom often more than three times per day, sometimes 20 times per week. Kristen uses the staffroom to eat and talk with other adults as well as to use the telephone. Kristen feels that staffroom conversations are important because "they can give you knowledge." She believes that conversations range from not significant to significant. Of the topics that teachers discuss more often than others, Kristen asserts that "we probably talk about children more often than we do other things." Kristen believes that staffroom conversations allow for teachers to learn from one another and to help meet the needs of students. She also noted that conversations reflect the school environment or the school culture. She stated, "If you have a negative staffroom, then

I think that there is a good chance that you will find that the school culture is a very negative one."

Dora was the next teacher interviewed for this study. She is an experienced teacher who teaches in an urban school at the primary level. Dora frequents the staffroom approximately 15 times per week. She uses the staffroom primarily for eating, although she states that she also used the staffroom for meeting with her Educational Assistant. Dora outlined that conversations that include professional development do not occur every time teachers talk in the staffroom. She believes that because you have educated professionals with good ideas sharing the same space, "every now and again some good conversations take place that are informal." Dora sees professional development discussions around the idea of strategies to improve student learning and venting taking place together. For instance, a behavioural student is causing difficulties in class, and as the teacher vents, other teachers may share strategies with that teacher. She feels that the sharing of strategies is a positive element of staffroom conversations.

George was the next teacher interviewed for this study. He is an experienced teacher with a variety of teaching assignments in his background. George teaches at a small, rural elementary school, and he has taught all divisions and all subjects throughout his career. George visits the staffroom on average about 20 times per week. He uses the staffroom mainly for eating at lunchtime. George views staffroom conversations as "a good way for them [teachers] to release some stress." He compares teachers exchanging ideas as similar to what could occur at a staff meeting, although on a less formal level. George perceives the staffroom as a place to be on the same social playing field as your coworkers. He asserts that the conversations in his teaching environment are balanced between personal and school items. However, he feels that it is more often professional conversation being used than frivolous discussion.

The next participant interviewed was Eleanor. She teaches at an intermediate urban school with diverse student needs. Eleanor is viewed as a leader by her fellow teachers. She frequents the staffroom on average 15 times per week on a fairly consistent basis. Eleanor uses the staffroom to eat lunch, drink tea, and visit with her coworkers. She also uses the staffroom to occasionally mark papers, phone parents, as well as for professional meetings to engage in professional communication with colleagues. Eleanor believes that staffroom conversations are extremely important because they allow for teachers, as professionals, to come together as adults to "vent" or "laugh" and "it's kind of a relief from the day." She feels that the topic that is most often discussed is professional communication around student success and how to support student learning. Eleanor notes that by discussing strategies, teachers can learn what works with specific students as well as what doesn't work.

Jackie is a primary teacher in an urban school who was interviewed. She visits the staffroom approximately 10 times per week. While in the staffroom she participates

in activities such as eating and chatting with fellow teachers. Jackie's school uses the staffroom to hold staff meetings. She also uses the staffroom as a place to work with small groups of students, similar to a resource room, because of the limited space at her school. Jackie asserts that staffroom conversations are very important because "I find that we often talk school issues, professional development, like we often talk about what each of us is doing to extend ourselves as learners." She also notes that another focus of professional communication that occurs is centered around children and issues of concern. By exchanging feedback and suggestions, Jackie feels that teachers can improve their own practice. Jackie maintains that "three quarters of our time we are talking teaching."

Professional communication is the most dominant theme in Jackie's staffroom, although she notes that teachers also discuss their own families. In this regard, she mentioned that her staff is predominately female and the reason that the high frequency of family discussion is centered around "woman talk." Jackie sympathizes with the few males on staff because she believes the imbalance impacts the conversation in the staffroom. It should be noted that Jackie asserts that teachers who are taking AQ courses extend their knowledge to the rest of the staff through informal discussion. For example, "we have three teachers alone with the Reading Parts I and II on our staff, so we often ask their thoughts about that; so what they are doing is feeding us new information and new learning."

The findings from the next interviewee, Candy, were consistent with the participants'data presented earlier. Candy is an experienced classroom teacher in a French Immersion urban school. She visits the staffroom on average approximately 15 times per week; however, Candy notes that she is more visible in the staffroom on the days that she does not have supervision duty. She stated that she uses the staffroom to get coffee, mail, and for eating lunch. Candy also illustrated that the staffroom can be used "just to sit and chat if it's not a busy day." She feels that staffroom conversations are important because they allow you to develop connections with your coworkers. Candy sees a mixture of conversations in her staffroom, ranging from serious to frivolous in nature. The most frequently discussed topic in Candy's staffroom was that of professional communication issues, on such issues as students. Candy also indicated that gossip was a frequent topic in her staffroom as a form of support for her fellow teachers. For instance, she stated "definitely complaining about your boss very frequently now and never used to, that sort of thing." Candy believes that gossip in the form of venting allows you to calm down and return to the classroom prepared to face the students. For example, she noted that "I think sometimes it boosts you because you think, yah, I'm not the only one going through that." Candy identified the topics of staffroom conversations as having an impact on school culture.

Pam was the next participant. She is an intermediate teacher in a small rural school with diverse levels of need. She frequents the staffroom approximately five times per

week, usually during the lunch hour. Pam uses the staffroom mainly for eating and conversation, although she notes that her time is limited to about 30 minutes during the 40-minute lunch time provided by the collective agreement between teachers and the school board.   Pam clearly stated her feelings in support of staffroom conversations: She found: "If as far as teaching we talk about what we can do with kids, especially X who is really good at math; I taught that child, and when I taught that child this is what worked for me. A lot of time it will spill over." Pam illustrated the concept of sharing strategies that work with specific children. This exchanging of ideas is central to professional communication in the staffroom. Pam noted that serious conversation is not regular in her staffroom and that there is a link between morale and the attitude of staffroom conversations. For instance, "it was fairly negative there for a while, you know, kid bashing a lot." Pam maintained that "it comes from the helm of everything" or the school's leadership.

When asked what the most frequent topic of conversation was in her staffroom, Pam concluded that it was the students. For example, she replied, "kids, yep kids, you live, breathe, eat, sleep these kids and you want to find out what is wrong and how you can fix it." Pam believes that talking about students positively impacts her performance in the classroom. She feels that with enough background and experience teachers can determine when a colleague is "just having a bad day and they bash all the kids" or whether the strategies discussed are useful or not.

The next participant interviewed was Paul. He is an intermediate teacher in an urban school. Paul is a teacher at the midpoint of his career who visits the staffroom between 15 and 20 times per week. Paul observes that he and his colleagues visit the staffroom more on Fridays. He uses the staffroom to collect mail, make phone calls, eat, and chat with other adults. In addition, Paul uses the staffroom to mark student work and use the Internet. He believes that staffroom conversations are important because they allow teachers to socialize with other adults and that "they give teachers a sense of belonging . . . allows them [teachers] to have some sort of social life." Paul's observations highlight the importance that the staffroom plays in the school. He admits that staffroom conversations can vary from sports to more serious themes "such as when a child makes a false allegation about a teacher and everyone feels like the witch hunt is on." Paul feels that topics of discussion such as the latter can impact the staffroom atmosphere. Further, he asserts that the tone of the staffroom can be dependent on the time of year (e.g., at school year's end and teachers are happy) and external focuses such as "when a problem parent is gunning for teachers, it can really bring down the staff morale."

When queried as to which topic was the most frequent in his staffroom, Paul noted that it was students; however, he stated that it was "not in the same way I would in an IPRC meeting. Most often it's more like gossip or venting about, and it's usually the bad ones."   Paul observed that families were the second most discussed topic in his staffroom. When asked what impact the topics of staffroom conversation had on his

teaching practice, Paul replied that "I often want to know if a student is a pain or behavioural problem." A specific example of external forces impacting the school culture and staffroom would be "power parents" who would put pressure on principals to ensure their children were straight A students, and "I've seen principals tell teachers to change report card marks because they know that parents would cause problems." Paul noted additional topics of staffroom conversation, such as sexual references or innuendos.

Lauren was the final interviewee in this study. She is an experienced teacher in the twilight of her career. She teaches at a rural school and visits the staffroom between 5 and 10 times per week. She uses the staffroom to collect mail, check the bulletin board, and as an escape from the classroom. Lauren, like Paul and others, feels that staffroom conversations are important because they allow you to "socialize with your coworkers. I mean, when you spend 99% of your time working with kids, it is nice to have time with other adults." Lauren had very strong emotions about her staffroom because "if I need to vent and blow off steam about a kid or a parent, or a principal, then it's nice to be able to unload and escape."

Lauren observed that the most common topic of conversation in her staffroom was students, "mostly the ones who cause problems though, I'm afraid. The bad ones get all the action in our room." She also noted that staff members like to keep one another appraised of their families in conversations. Lauren believes that sharing strategies allows teachers to find out "how someone else dealt with them [students] if they happened to be in my classroom, that sort of thing." Furthermore, she asserts that staffroom discussion impacts the school environment "because everyone is sharing information and ideas . . . it's the only time we get to do that. I mean, you get an honest opinion about the kids, and everyone appreciates that."

5. Discussion

The interview responses found that the most frequent theme of Professional Communication included the discussion of students, strategies, and the exchange of ideas. This finding acknowledges the prior research of Hammersley (1984), Fullan (1995) and Ben-Peretz and Schonmann (2000). Professional Communication was followed by Grumbling, and Gossip (Rosenholtz, 1989). In addition, the topic of family (Kainan, 1997) included for example, spouse or children and friendship items such as hockey, television programs, and frivolous chit-chat. Major staffroom activities incorporated eating, drinking, and interacting with other adults, chatting, collecting mail, educational schedules, relaxation, using the telephone and meeting with non-teaching staff members.

Using 12 in-depth audio-taped teacher interviews, the research illustrated the ideas and thoughts of teachers on the topic of staffroom conversations. The qualitative data presented characteristics of different staffroom models unavailable using quantitative

methods alone. The qualitative findings, like the quantitative data, should be considered within the context of the initial research questions developed for this study. Although the teachers interviewed possessed various levels of experience and worked in different teaching environments, many of their responses to the interview questions have similar characteristics and are homogeneous. Participants interviewed consistently identified professional communication as the main topic of discussion in their staffrooms. Often this exchange of ideas was student centered. The differences in responses can be attributed to the various contrasts in each teacher's school environment and leadership.

6. Summary

The data gathered through both quantitative and qualitative indicated that professional communication was the most frequent topic of discussion. However, it should be noted that teachers also expressed a high frequency of grumblings or venting in the staffroom, which indicated the importance of the staffroom as a safe haven for teachers to escape (Nias, 1989). Teachers' use of the staffroom is dualistic. It provides teachers an opportunity to develop professionally, although informally. In addition it allows teachers a release from the toil of the classroom, and a chance to vent or grumble and gossip, although the latter does not occur frequently. Beginning teachers or pre-service B.Ed. students, when they enter the staffroom, are exposed to a window through which one can view the school's culture. Teachers are beginning to unconsciously seek out opportunities for professional development within their own school setting as the school becomes a place where everything that a child needs, society is expecting be done.

A thorough investigation of the data presented in this study would indicate that there is a need for recognition at the B.Ed. programming level and school board level of the importance of the informal interactive professionalism that occurs in the staffroom setting. This study can provide senior administrators and principals with the means to provide school leaders with insight into the importance or proper integration of the principal into staffroom conversations. It would be beneficial to identify principals in their early stages of development and encourage them to enhance or change their practice to include meaningful staffroom discussions, although informal, on an as-needs basis for staff development and school improvement.

Clearly, teachers are acquiring knowledge and skills through staffroom conversations. The survey data indicated that teachers do not always gain knowledge by taking Addition Qualification courses. The significant finding of this study is that teachers are gaining professional knowledge that will impact their practice in the classroom.

It is clear to many educators that principals need in-service in the area of staff development. Improving teacher performance should not be undertaken as a punitive measure by misusing the TPA. Informal communication can improve relations

between administration and teachers, and is a means to creating an effective model for school improvement without using economic resources. By exchanging ideas, teachers and principals can together develop the strategies needed for their individual school. The informal staffroom model allows for learning to occur without using the "empty bucket" staff meeting approach. It also facilitates opportunities for principals to foster the mentoring and supervision of a group of teachers.

7. Conclusion

Most of the training teachers receive does not cover issues such as interpersonal relations among teachers. However, socialization is central to the daily routine that a member of the teaching profession must perform in the school setting. B.Ed. students are first exposed to the backstage atmosphere of the staffroom when they arrive at their first practice teaching placement. Novice and experienced teachers alike can hopefully experience a kind of informal learning in the staffroom that occurs as a result of genuine interactions among teachers. This mentor and protégé approach of staffroom discussion, although informal, is a time-honoured tradition that is passed on to B.Ed. students and beginning teachers. Combined with their formal schooling in the B.Ed. program, this can provide teachers with insight into how the occupation provides its own education, passed on from generation to generation. Also, in the Ontario context, recent renaming of old ideas, such as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is considered to be a means whereby communication and teacher growth are realized. Within this context, professional communication in the staffroom continues to be a form of continuing education for teachers.

It is axiomatic that no one study provides a panacea. Nevertheless, it is only through the accumulation of specific facts that contributions to knowledge can be made. As such, this study makes a contribution to our understanding informal teacher education in the staffroom.

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