

Overseas Research on Teacher Collaboration: Progress and Enlightenment

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Abstract

Teacher collaboration is of great significance to improve the professional ability and development of teachers. This study shows that the traditional path of teachers' professional development has gradually lagged behind the pace of the development of the times, and the new path of teachers' professional development with teachers' collaboration as the core is attracting much attention. This study examines and reflects on the hot topics in the concept and practice of teacher collaboration from the aspects of the theoretical implication, manifestation and implementation dilemma of teacher collaboration. In fact, under the development concept of teacher collaboration, there are many implementation difficulties. Providing time guarantee for teacher collaboration, guiding teachers to correctly understand teacher collaboration and balancing the limits of teacher autonomy and collaboration are very important to promote teacher collaboration.

Keywords: teacher collaboration, teacher professional development, professional learning community

1. Introduction

At present, in the worldwide reform of teacher education, the new path of teacher professional development with teacher collaboration as the core is attracting the attention of all walks of life. The research topic on teacher collaboration began in the 1990s. The research focus is mainly on how to improve teachers' cooperative ability, which is closely related to the increasingly popular cooperative teaching and group teaching. In the recent years, as Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) regards teacher collaboration as an important dimension to measure teachers' teaching, a large number of research literature on teacher collaboration at home and abroad have emerged. In the past 30 years, although the academic circles have discussed the theoretical construction, practical demands, functions and influencing factors of teacher collaboration, teacher collaboration is not a mature theoretical system, and there are still disputes about its concept, form and practice (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Through the analysis of foreign literature on teacher collaboration research, this paper seeks the context of teacher collaboration development, and summarizes the cutting-edge orientation of teacher collaboration, in order to provide some useful reference for teacher collaboration research in China.

1.1 The Theoretical Implication of Teacher Collaboration

Teacher collaboration can not only play a role as a core element in a specific educational situation, but also be studied as an independent educational unit. Some foreign scholars have conducted independent research on teacher collaboration. They regard teacher collaboration as teachers' social ability and the value embodiment of social capital. Effective teacher collaboration has the characteristics of interdependence, collective responsibility, mutual openness and emotional security (Stoll et al., 2006).

Little first put forward the theoretical construction of teacher collaboration. He believes that collaboration includes four aspects: Storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid and support, sharing and joint work. The first two dimensions are the lowest level of collaboration, because they are a one-way flow of collaboration. For example, storytelling only requires the lecturer to tell the audience or provide assistance and support to those in need. Sharing is a higher-level form of collaboration, which requires both parties or groups to exchange experience, views, ideas, etc. Working together is the highest form of collaboration, which contains the real spirit of collaboration (Little, 1990). Gräsel integrated and redefined Little's cooperative relationship, and put forward three levels of Teacher Cooperative Construction: exchange, division of work and co construction. Communication is the lowest level of collaboration, which means that both sides should share and exchange

information, materials and knowledge; Work assignment is a higher level of collaboration, which means that the participants of collaboration reach an agreement on a common goal and allocate tasks to achieve it. The final result is the combination of personal achievements; Joint construction is the most advanced form of collaboration, which requires partners to work at the same time until the task is completed (Gräsel et al., 2006).

Teacher collaboration not only plays a role as a basic educational unit, but also as a core element to promote collective development in the professional learning community. Since the concept of "teachers' professional learning community" was first put forward by Hord in the 1990s, the research on teachers' professional learning community began to start (Hord, 1997). As for how to accurately define the term "teacher professional learning community", there is no unified universal concept in the academic community. Achinstein (2002) defined the professional learning community from the following aspects: a group of people who work together in schools; To a certain extent, it has a set of common values, norms and directions for teaching, students and school education; Work in synergy with structures that promote interdependence (Achinstein, 2002). Stoll et al. (2006) further refined the concept of teachers' professional learning community. He believes that professional learning community is a group that shares and explores practice in a way of promoting development under the guidance of persistence, reflection, collaboration, inclusiveness and learning (Stoll et al., 2006).

The diversified forms of professional learning community make teacher collaboration have different terminology frameworks in different educational situations. For example, foreign scholars Cohen and Bailey (1997), Raes et al. (2015) have described the forms of teacher collaboration in two teacher professional learning communities: teacher team and teacher group, They define the collaboration in the teacher team and teacher group as the core pillar of the community composed of individuals who have collective responsibility for teachers' teaching and students' learning, and it is an important basis for the development of school teaching. Roberts (2010) introduced the term of professional learning community to the practice level, put forward the collaboration form of practice community, and put more emphasis on the concentration and orientation of practice in collaboration. Although the teacher collaboration in these different educational situations shows the general meaning and common meaning of collaboration to a certain extent, it contains multiple and complex forms of teacher collaboration, which is vaguer and complex. It not only interferes with scholars' understanding and understanding of teacher collaboration, but also is difficult to sort out the realistic and operable path of how to carry out teacher collaboration.

2. Forms of Teacher Collaboration

2.1 Two Forms of Collaboration of TALIS

With the development of economic, political and cultural globalization, there is also a trend of globalization in the field of education. The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) carried out by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has gradually attracted the attention of the educational circles. As an international large-scale evaluation project, TALIS aims to obtain the information of school teaching, teacher development and principal leadership through questionnaire measurement of teachers and principals, so as to provide useful reference for international teaching reform and development. Since 2008, TALIS has been evaluated every five years. So far, three rounds of tests have been implemented. In the TALIS questionnaire, the section of teacher collaboration has always occupied a place, highlighting the current international attention to teacher collaboration. The teacher collaboration of TALIS mainly includes two forms: one is the communication and coordination between teachers; Second, teachers' professional collaboration in classroom teaching (TALIS, 2018).

First, the communication and coordination among teachers are mainly divided into four practical orientations: the first is the exchange or research and development of teaching materials between teachers and colleagues, that is, teachers share teaching resources; The second is to discuss the learning development of a specific student, that is, the directional communication between teachers; The third is to cooperate with other teachers in the school to ensure the common standard for evaluating students' progress, that is, teachers negotiate the common evaluation standard for measuring students' development; The fourth is to participate in teacher meetings, that is, to conduct teacher group exchanges on time.

Second, teachers' professional collaboration in classroom teaching is mainly divided into four practical orientations. The first is to teach collectively in the same class, that is, teachers as a teaching group jointly guide a course; The second is to provide feedback to other teachers about their practice, that is, teachers give certain evaluation to other teachers after classroom observation; The third is to participate in joint activities of different classes and age groups, specifically referring to some school level projects; The fourth is to participate in cooperative professional learning, that is, teachers' active participation in professional learning.

The results of TALIS in 2018 showed that in the process of teacher collaboration, teachers' participation in communication and coordination was higher, while teachers' participation in professional collaboration in classroom teaching was lower. In addition, in the communication and coordination among teachers, 61% of teachers indicated that they discussed students' learning status at least once a month (TALIS, 2018). However, the problem we need to recognize is the professional collaboration of teachers in classroom teaching. The frequency of application in the current school teaching is very low. The teacher collaboration of most schools has not reached the practical level of professional collaboration, and is still at the lower practical level of communication and sharing resources among teachers.

2.2 Cooperative Form of Teacher Learning Community

The concept of "learning community" is generated by transplanting the word "community" in the field of sociology into the field of pedagogy. It refers to an organizational group in which both sides of learning support and encourage each other and trust each other in order to achieve common learning and growth. Based on common values, the teacher learning community is characterized by collaboration, inclusiveness, openness and sharing, and aims to promote teachers' professional growth and development to guide teachers to communicate and discuss teaching related issues, listen to responses, and answer questions and doubts. Countries have taken the construction of teachers' professional learning community as an important measure to improve the quality of education and improve the ranks of teachers. For example, in order to reform the teacher education system and promote the innovation and development of schools, the United States has established the organizational form of teachers' professional learning community, namely Professional Development School (PDS) (Zhou, 2020). The UK has also organized the "Effective Professional Learning Communities" (EPLC) project to explore the effective characteristics of professional learning communities, so as to build an effective professional learning community model to promote teachers' professional learning (Du, 2010).

Specifically, many states and regions in the United States have begun to generally use a new form of collaboration - teacher study group to improve teachers' teaching difficulties and break through students' learning difficulties. This form of collaboration is carried out regularly, focusing on what measures can affect students' learning and stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm, encourage them to actively explore and carry out collaborative problem solving. The teacher research group does not focus on a series of theme teaching, but focuses on a single pre-selected theme for a period of time, such as the teaching practice of how to quickly read in a short time. In addition, the teacher research group also pays attention to the injection of new power (for example, university teachers or master teachers). On a certain issue, it will communicate with experts outside the group in time to absorb the power of collective knowledge, so as to integrate new knowledge and skills into the exploration process (Firestone et al., 2020). In the UK, Zeng and day (2019) pointed out that formal collaboration activities and informal collaboration activities are the main forms of middle school teachers' collaboration (Zeng & Day, 2019). The so-called formal cooperative activities are collective planning and lesson preparation, formal teacher meetings, and informal cooperative activities are informal dialogues between teachers and colleagues in school, such as teachers discussing the learning status and situation of a specific student in the office. Informal collaboration is more likely to occur in an unconscious state.

3. The Dilemma of Teacher Collaboration

3.1 The Time Requirement of Collaboration Is Generally Ignored

For collaboration, whether the time is satisfied or not has become a problem and difficulty unanimously appealed by front-line teachers at home and abroad. Many studies have shown that teachers' lack of collaboration time is the biggest obstacle to teachers' collaboration. For example, Bush and Grotjohann (2020) pointed out that the three most common obstacles for teachers to cooperate are lack of personal time, lack of collective time and lack of administrative priority. When exploring the favorable and unfavorable factors of teacher collaboration, EdD (2020) stressed that the main obstacle to successful collaboration is the lack of collaboration time and structure space. When studying the relationship between teacher collaboration, differentiated teaching and teacher efficacy, Goddard and Kim (2015) also pointed out that lack of time is the biggest problem affecting teacher collaboration. Teachers' participation in collaboration not only needs to grasp their own personal time, but also coordinate their collective time.

In short, teacher collaboration faces two major time obstacles. First, teachers' personal time shortage leads to the occurrence of collaboration. This is because under the current class teaching mode, teachers pay more attention to whether the students in their own teaching class have mastered enough knowledge and skills, and rarely have time to take into account the teaching situation of other classes. Second, there are too few time and space opportunities for teachers to cooperate in the school organization system. The main reason is that the system and mechanism of teacher collaboration in the current school education system is not perfect, teachers lack a

scientific and reasonable collaboration mechanism, and there is no perfect teacher collaboration reward and evaluation system. The organizational system conditions of schools limit the opportunities of collaboration between primary and secondary school teachers.

3.2 Deliberately Pursue the Harmony and Order of Collaboration

Collaboration does not mean harmony and order, but too calm teacher collaboration has the risk of rupture. On the contrary, teacher collaboration with inclusiveness and heterogeneity is more dynamic and creative. Roberts (2010) believes that power plays an important role in the community. After being infected by the collective values and vision, individuals with less power are more likely to agree with the opinions of more power individuals. Standing on the edge of the power center, they choose to avoid conflicts and contradictions and passively cater to the rhythm and arrangement of collaboration. Teacher collaboration includes members with different positions in terms of experience, professional knowledge, age, personality and authority in the organization. Cooperative members with different positions have different degrees of participation. In addition, culture plays a role of link in Teachers' professional learning community and is the spiritual connection between members. China is deeply influenced by traditional Confucianism and advocates collectivism and the value concept of harmony and consistency. This culture makes teachers deliberately pursue a harmonious collaboration atmosphere in the process of collaboration. There are potential risks and crises under harmonious and orderly collaboration. Under the influence of this thought, young teachers who have just started work are more likely to cater to the opinions and ideas of older teachers in collaboration, dare not express their opinions, and deliberately participate in collaboration, which makes the collaboration lose its due vitality and creativity.

3.3 Pay One-Sided Attention to Teachers' Functional Professional Development

Man is a complex social animal, often affected by emotion. If people's emotional needs are not met, there will be disappointment and negative psychological obstacles, which will affect work efficiency. Evan (2002) once defined a framework for teachers' Professional Development: functional professional development and emotional professional development. The so-called functional professional development includes the aspects of procedure and production, which refers to "the development related to their own professional development and the content or quantity of 'production' or 'doing' in their work; emotional professional development includes two aspects of intelligence and motivation, which refers to "the development of individual thinking, thinking process, ideas and motivation". Functional professional development and emotional professional development are indispensable and complement each other to promote teachers' professional learning and growth. However, the current school management and teacher collaboration pay more attention to teachers' functional professional development, emphasize teachers' teaching output and efficiency, blindly pursue the optimization of teachers' teaching results and the maximization of students' learning achievements, and ignore teachers' emotional professional development. In this situation, teachers will have more and more pressure on collaboration and gradually produce self-doubt. Over time, it will affect teachers' sense of organizational commitment, self-efficacy, as well as their values and vision. Teachers lose emotional support, leaving only an empty body to work mechanically, which is not conducive to the healthy development of teachers' body and mind and the growth of professional ability.

4. Implementation Strategy of Teacher Collaboration

4.1 Provide Time Guarantee for Teachers' Collaboration

The growth and development of anything is inseparable from the polishing and cultivation of time, as is the path of teachers' professional development. Teachers can find their own professional orientation and accumulate certain professional capital only after quality and quantity collaboration. It is worth noting that the time we advocate for giving teachers collaboration is not to enlarge teachers' power without purpose and scope and wantonly consume teachers' teaching time, but to give teachers time for collaboration and flexibly adjust their own timetable and curriculum. The time problem of teacher collaboration not only puzzles our teachers, but also is a very difficult problem in western countries such as Britain and the United States. To solve this problem, we should not only think of ways at the level of teachers, but also look at the education system and school management system of the whole country. Only by advancing layer by layer and gradually approaching the source of the problem can we completely solve this problem. First of all, at the national level, we should grasp the strength of educational accountability, not pay too much attention to students' academic achievements, comprehensively investigate the growth of students' comprehensive ability, give the education system a certain vitality and motivation, and further balance the disadvantages of the examination oriented education system. This not only reduces the heavy pressure of students' schoolwork, but also reduces the heavy pressure of teachers' teaching; Secondly, at the school level, leaders should establish the awareness of shared leadership, provide opportunities for teachers to participate in the decision-making process, improve their leadership in

teaching, and provide some administrative support for teachers to participate in collaboration.

4.2 Guide Teachers to Dialectically Participate in Teacher Collaboration

A harmonious and united working atmosphere plays an essential role in any collective. Conflict and harmony seem to be opposite, but in fact they can coexist. Conflict can make people's thinking active, generate new ideas and solve problems. Harmony can provide a lubricant for the cultivation of relations in the collective and ensure the smooth development of a collective. At present, China's teacher collaboration is restricted by some factors, deliberately pursuing harmonious collaboration and ignoring the power of conflict, so that teacher collaboration cannot play its due cooperative effect. The first reason is the deep-rooted influence of authoritarianism in China. Novice teachers spontaneously have a sense of awe and obedience to experienced teachers. In collaboration, novice teachers always passively cater to the opinions, views and opinions of experienced teachers. The second is the influence of traditional Confucian thought. Chinese people are always willing to pursue harmony and unity and deliberately avoid conflicts and contradictions. This is both advantageous and disadvantageous. The advantageous side is that teachers are more likely to invest in collaboration and are willing to share and exchange teaching experience and materials; The disadvantage is that teachers deliberately pursue harmony, which kills the germination of conflict and heterogeneous opinions in collaboration. Therefore, schools should guide teachers to establish a correct sense of competition by implementing scientific and democratic management and Optimizing Teachers' teaching assessment and evaluation, and promote teachers' equal dialogue, mutual consultation and communication, and learn from each other's strengths to make up for their weaknesses. On the one hand, schools should guide novice teachers to dare to question and challenge authority and adhere to their own views. In collaboration, every teacher is required to express their own views to break the poison of authoritarianism. On the other hand, teachers should be guided to participate in teacher collaboration dialectically and rationally and carry out appropriate conflict.

4.3 Make up for Teachers' Emotional Professional Development Needs

As the path of teachers' professional ability development, collaboration has social attributes and is a mechanism for different individuals in the collective to interact and balance. Collaboration needs not only to be guaranteed by system, but also to closely unite heterogeneous individuals with emotion. It is different from organizations and groups constructed solely by system or rules. Evan (2002) believes that teacher collaboration must have both functional and emotional mechanisms, and the two balance and restrict each other, so as to achieve the optimization of collaboration. If the state and schools pay too much attention to the functional mechanism of collaboration and require teachers to produce enough efficiency and output through cooperative activities, it will seriously affect teachers' motivation and organizational commitment. Lu (2012) said that emotion is one of the main sources of people's driving force and has the effect of enhancing or weakening the driving force of behavior. Maslow (1954) also stressed that emotional needs are people's high-level needs. After physiological needs are met, people will have the motivation to obtain emotional needs. Man is a social animal, which needs collective care in order to burst out a stronger development momentum. Spiritual commonality can truly realize spiritual dependence. Therefore, teacher collaboration should take into account the functional and emotional needs of teachers, establish a stronger and lasting teacher professional learning community, realize the spiritual and emotional connection between teachers, and provide a more solid foundation and guarantee for collaboration.

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