NEGOTIATING INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAMING
IN A MIDDLE-LEVEL SCHOOL CONTEXT

A Thesis in
Curriculum and Instruction

by

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ABSTRACT

Interdisciplinary teaming refers to a team of teachers from various disciplines teaching the same core group of students. While a body of research exists to support teaming, especially in a middle-level context, teams themselves are rarely afforded the time to reflect on their practice and inclusion on a team. One of the components of teaming includes interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction which implies an integration of subjects affording students the opportunity to make connections in their learning.

As a team teacher for six years, I decided to explore my own team of six teachers in order to gain a better understanding of how one team functions. I divided the subjects of the study into two groups: Team A refers to the team I studied for the first two years, and Team B refers to teachers, three of whom are new, in the last six months of the study. The questions I attempt to answer after nearly three years of research including conducting interviews, observing and taking fieldnotes and collecting artifacts are:

1. How do team teachers understand interdisciplinary teaming in a middle level context?

2. What are the patterns or characteristics of an interdisciplinary team?

3. How do teams define success and negotiate the culture of teaming?

4. How can a team be more effective?

An ethnographic case study, my research understands teams as cultures which were intentionally created as micro-societies within schools. With unique traditions, procedures and vocabulary, teams can only be measured against themselves with teaming research used as a guideline only.
Team effectiveness should be considered by unique, shared goals teams set for themselves. Three clusters of categories essential to effective teams emerged from the research I conducted with my team of five to six teachers, Team 8 Orange. These include team management, team personnel and team objectives which together contribute to team effectiveness. The four aspects of team management are team leadership, time, and administrative support. The second cluster, team personnel includes the following qualities: commitment to teaming, personality, communication skills and trustworthiness. The third and final cluster, team objectives, consists of three aspects: shared goals, interdisciplinary curriculum, and focus on students. (See Table 1)

After a description of Team 8 Orange as it relates to each component of effective teaming taken from the fieldwork, I conclude Team A, the team I worked with for the first half of my study, could have been more effective while Team B, my current team, must remain committed to improvement in order to avoid the fate of Team A. Finally, the study concludes with an analysis of the components as they relate to Team A and B as well as a look at the future of teaming.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW OF INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAMING</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction and Definition of Teaming</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 History of Teaming</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Interdisciplinary Teaming Rationale and Benefits</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Interdisciplinary Teaming and Curriculum Connections</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Teaming Problems</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Teaming Methods</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW OF INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction and History</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Benefits of Interdisciplinary Curriculum</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Interdisciplinary Curriculum and Teaming</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Problems and Methods</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Conclusions</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Ethnographic Case Study</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Research Process</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Data Analysis</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: EFFECTIVE TEAMING</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Understanding Teaming</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Components of Effective Teaming ........................................................... 51

CHAPTER 6: TEAM PERSONNEL ................................................................. 54
6.1 Introduction ................................................................................................ 54
6.2 Personality .................................................................................................. 55
6.3 Commitment to Teaming ........................................................................... 59
6.4 Communication .......................................................................................... 63
6.5 Trust ........................................................................................................... 68

CHAPTER 7: TEAM MANAGEMENT .............................................................. 71
7.1 Introduction ................................................................................................ 71
7.2 Team Leader ............................................................................................... 71
7.3 Meetings ..................................................................................................... 73
7.4 Time to Meet and Plan ............................................................................... 81
7.5 Administrative Support .............................................................................. 83

CHAPTER 8: TEAM OBJECTIVES ................................................................. 88
8.1 Introduction ................................................................................................ 88
8.2 Focus on Students ...................................................................................... 88
8.3 Shared Goals ............................................................................................... 87
8.4 Interdisciplinary Curriculum ...................................................................... 96

CHAPTER 9: COMPARING TEAMS ............................................................... 102
9.1 Summary of Clusters/Components of Teaming ......................................... 102
9.2 Improving Team Effectiveness ................................................................. 114

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSIONS ................................................................. 119
10.1 Suggestions for Future Research ........................................................... 119
10.2 Conclusions..............................................................119

WORKS CITED..............................................................................................................123

APPENDIX A: Table of Team 8 Orange Members..................................................129-30

APPENDIX B: List of Terms......................................................................................131

APPENDIX C: Meeting Schedules and Notes..............................................................132

APPENDIX D: TASC Poster of Rules......................................................................133

APPENDIX E: Team Jobs and Responsibilities......................................................134

APPENDIX F: Language Arts/Science Integrated Lesson Plan..........................135

APPENDIX G: Language Arts/Science Integrated Lesson Plan..........................136

APPENDIX H: Language Arts/Science Integrated Unit Plan..............................137
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: TABLE OF TEAM 8 ORANGE TEAM MEMBERS.................................6
FIGURE 2: CLUSTERS OF EFFECTIVE TEAMING........................................52
FIGURE 3: TEAM SEATING ARRANGEMENTS..............................................66
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I would like to thank my principal for allowing me take advantage of 9th period planning to attend classes as well as for participating in this study. Finally, I would like to thank all team members, Nathan, John L., Jessica, Larry, Kim, Laura, Chrissy, John R., Luke and Sara for listening to me harp about teaming and being involved in this study in a variety of capacities including the video we made nearly three years ago. It was my team who let me study them, ask endless questions of them and who supported me throughout the process. From the bottom of my heart, Thank You.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A man was driving down a country road when a deer ran in front of his car causing him to swerve and drive the car into a ditch. Looking around he saw nothing but farmland; glancing down his cell phone read “no service.” The man had no choice but to walk to the nearest farmhouse and ask for help. When a farmer answered the door the unlucky man explained the situation to him, asking if he had any means to help pull his car out of the ditch. “Well,” said the farmer, “My pickup truck is in for repairs, but I do have a mule named Ted you’re welcome to borrow. He may just do the trick.” So the man and the farmer led the mule to the car and tied him to the fender. “On three,” said the farmer, “Ted, Sally, Buck and Sue, pull . . . one, two, three.” Ted pulled with all his might and the car moved easily out of the ditch. Though impressed, the man asked the farmer why he called out four names when there was only one mule. “You see,” answered the farmer, “Ted is blind, and he pulls a heck of a lot harder when he thinks he’s part of a team.”

The concept of teamwork is not exclusive to education. Some businesses, sports, and even marriages all have in common a group of people helping and supporting each other to accomplish common goals. Whether that goal is to make a profit, win a game, or guide each other through life, teams can do more together than the individual can do alone. The theme for my school district this year is, “Teachers Make it Happen.” If one teacher can make a difference, certainly five can make more of a difference in the lives of children.
Because of my belief that interdisciplinary teams can impact adolescent learning more effectively together, I have chosen to spend the last two years reading about teaming, taking notes at my own team meetings and talking to my team about what we do, where we’ve been and where our team is going.

Over forty years ago teachers in some schools were re-structured from subject-oriented departments to interdisciplinary teams and were given the same core group of students. The interdisciplinary team “gradually move[d] the focus from a single subject to a bigger picture, the total learning environment and the interrelatedness of subject matter” (Tanner 47). A well-designed integrative unit meets the needs of students with varying abilities, involves student choice and uses differentiated measures of assessment. Focus should be given to areas strengthened by integration such as relationships among subjects, groups process skills, higher-order thinking, self-esteem building, and other legitimate instructional objectives that go beyond the limits of any one subject area to provide an integrated focus for the unit (Erb & Doda 111).

Teaming can be an effective tool in curriculum integration and both curriculum integration and teaming benefit adolescents. Team teaching is not new; there is little in team teaching that as not been researched and evaluated in some way in connection with and apart from the team teaching per se (Heller 43). We value collaboration as it applies to students in the form of groups working together for a common goal; why should we value it any less for teachers? Some see the possibilities for collaboration as one of the main benefits of teaming. Working together, team members enjoy support from fellow professionals. In teaming, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Arbor & Schamber 18).
In 1964, M. Delbert Lobb suggested: “The keystone in a rationale for team teaching is the belief that the total accomplishment of the group can be greater than the sum of the talents of the individual teachers. It is the hope that the cooperative endeavor, the synergy, will produce results that are greater and more far-reaching than isolated individual efforts” (8). A major benefit of teaming is the combined effort of varies professionals bringing unique experiences in a combined effort to educate students. Teams can include teachers with specialized knowledge and skills in a given area of the curriculum (Drake 59). In an article focusing on middle schoolers, Gary Weilbacher asserts that curriculum integration provides “students with opportunities to make connections among the traditional academic disciplines, the community, and their own experiences” (20). The benefits of teaming include a variety of discipline backgrounds, combined experiences, variety of skills and the possibility of integration of each of these elements.

I began my research with questions such as: How is teaming beneficial? Why were teams created? Can teaming and interdisciplinary curriculum exist exclusively? While I believed my study would attempt to answer these questions, I realized through research these questions had already been sufficiently answered. The benefits of interdisciplinary teaming are well documented. Delbert Lobb, in a 1962 report on the staff utilization program by Premont Union High School District, Sunnyvale, California, refers to “meeting different educational problems because of the flexibility of class size” as a benefit of interdisciplinary teams. When teaming, teachers can not only vary their instructional methods, but also their modes of delivery. While Lobb was writing at the beginning of the educational movement toward teaming, Dickinson and Erb in 1997 cite
three studies over the past decade that have provided empirical evidence that teaming does have a positive effect on student performance (526). Gable and Manning agree: “The generative efforts of collaboration can benefit all students, as educators work together to eliminate ineffective classroom practices and to address the differentiated instructional needs of a heterogeneous population of students” (185). These include easier access to integrated curriculum, the sharing of knowledge, methods and materials, a sense of teamwork and togetherness in teachers and students, and teachers working together to accomplish more while being empowered to make decisions that benefit students.

There is no doubt that teaming was implemented because it promised to give a sense of community to an age group of students who desperately need both structure and support. What I found in the process was the answer to why we should be teaming but not are we teaming? So while I understood the rationale for putting teachers on teams, I began to wonder if these teams actually looked and acted like the teams they were created to emulate. If teams have evolved into teams in name only, should administrators continue to invest time and money into maintaining a commitment to interdisciplinary teams? Should teamed teachers stop to think about their own teams and ask questions such as: “Is my team as effective as possible? How can my team be improved? And “What does the research say about moving my team from functional to effective?” Administrators and teachers who invest in teaming can read this study as it attempts to answers these questions and gain insight into whether or not their own teams may need to be re-defined.
The focus of this study originated out of a desire to add to the literature a defense
of interdisciplinary teaming as a successful way to enhance the education of middle
school students. As a member of a team, I believed in its ideals and agreed with much of
the existing literature. Three years ago in 2001-2002 I was a member of a five person
team including:

- Nathan, Physical Science
- John, Social Studies
- Jessica, Math
- Kim, Special Education.
- Myself, Language Arts (See Figure 1)

Nathan and Jessica are teaching veterans and have both been teaching for over fifteen
years. With a chemistry degree, Nathan began teaching high school but was asked to
teach 8th grade after a few years and has stayed in the middle school because “they’re an
interesting age group.” After finishing college, John was hired by Roaring Brook School
District as the gifted coordinator but, in 2001 when an American Cultures position open
up, he immediately took the opportunity to get into the classroom. Kim, a mother of one
who went back to school to receive her degree in special education, was a first-year
teacher. Kim was a new member of the team while the other four had been together for
two years.

Roaring Brook School District is the fastest growing district in Pennsylvania.
With over 10,000 students, it consists of multiple elementary school, two middle schools
and two high schools. A progressive district, new programs are implemented often, at
times to the dismay of the staff who feels programs should not be implemented for
# FIGURE 1

**TABLE OF TEAM 8 ORANGE MEMBERS**

## Team 8 White

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<tr>
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<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
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<td>Derrick</td>
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<td>John</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
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<tr>
<td>Him</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cherry</td>
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*Length of Time with Team*
changes sake and rather should be implemented slowly, with training. Set in the Pocono
Mountains, the community consists of some who have been in the area for years and
others who have migrated from New York, New Jersey and other states looking for better
schooling for their children and a slower lifestyle.

The staff at Roaring Brook Intermediate School where I teach is fairly young.
Those some teachers are certainly veterans who have been with the district for many
years, a running joke among teachers is obtaining the status of “veteran” after just three
years. Indeed, out of eight teacher who began with me six years ago, only one has
remained while the others have all taken jobs closer to their homes. Roaring Brook hires
many teachers each year as a growing district; last year over sixty teachers joined the
faculty at RBSD. Many use it as a stepping stone, taking a job, commuting to work and
later taking a job closer to home. Though I commute ½ hour each way, I have stayed
because I enjoy the curricular freedom given to me by both my supervisor and
administration. I enjoy working with the majority of the staff and feel supported by my
principal. In a five-member carpool, the commute has become, to me, just another part of
the job.

When I was first introduced to teaming I knew very little about the concept as it
related to education. The first two years I saw the team mainly as a resource. As a new
teacher, I had many questions about policies and procedures and looked to my team for
support with discipline, administrative responsibilities, parent conferences and other
tasks. Their help was invaluable and, looking back, I imagine how much more difficult it
would have been to assimilate without their knowledge and guidance. Tuckman’s
teaming model refers to this as the “forming” stage characterized by polite discourse and increased interdependency.

My earliest research began about this time when a special education and reading teacher, Laura, was added as a new team member, bringing the total team to six members. The following year Kim (special education) was replaced by Chrissy who was just out of college and teaching for the first time; the bulk of my research focused on this team of six. This year, the team dynamic changed completely when Luke replaced John as the Social Studies teacher. Luke, a teaching veteran, previously held an elementary degree. When the 6th grade split off from the 7th and 8th grades, Luke knew an elementary setting was not for him. After taking the middle school praxis in the summer, joined the middle school once again. Llamar replaced Chrissy in special education. Though a few years out of college, Llamar decided to go back to school for Special Education and is teaching for the first time on our team. Sara, a second year teacher who was previously on another 8th grade team in our building, replaced Laura as the reading teacher. Essentially, a new team was created this year with only the original members, myself, Nathan and Jessica. (See Appendix A)

Just as the team members changed, my focus of the study changed as well. Research showed teams could work and offered the possibility for an enhanced learning and teaching experience. What I realized, however, was that teachers themselves, myself included, were not aware of teaming research and strategies. Administrators decided teams were the right choice for middle schools in my district, and they were put in place. And while a few teachers reported a one-day teaming workshop, most of those teachers no longer teach in our middle school. An informal poll of the teachers in my
school told me that very few teachers were trained in any way regarding interdisciplinary teaming.

By understanding in more detail how teachers work together, how they negotiate everything from student discipline to choosing a team leader, we can better understand the functioning of a real team and use these understandings to evaluate the future of teaming.

Though I have been a member of Team 8 Orange for six years, I will refer to it as two separate teams. For the first five years a majority of the team members remained the same. Team A is the subject of the first two years of my research during this time. In 2003-2004, three of six team members were replaced. I refer to this team make-up as Team B. Like most interdisciplinary teams, both A and B consist of one teacher in each major discipline—language arts, science, social studies, math, and reading in addition to a special education teacher.

Team 8 Orange defines itself differently than the textbook definition of what teams should look and act like. This study will give an in-depth look at the culture of teaming attempting to answer the question, how can teams be more effective? First, however, we must understand how each team defines both itself and effective teaming in order to understand if they have met or failed to meet their own expectations.

After taking notes at team meetings for over a year and talking to my fellow teammates, I’ve begun to formulate some assumptions about interdisciplinary teaming. I believe that while teaming can be beneficial to students, my own team is not functioning to its full potential. I feel more effort is needed in order to make it less a team in name only. I also wonder if effective teaming is possible without the right combination of
personality and shared philosophy. By combining previous research and my own notes, I’ve compiled a list of ingredients I believe are necessary in order to effectively team. They include: administrative support, training, shared philosophies, a desire to learn, planning time, communication and group skills, trust, a focus on students, a willingness to grow professionally, and an understanding of roles. While the literature on teaming lists many of the same components to successful teams, the one most underestimated yet necessary to teaming success is a shared philosophy. If teachers do not buy into the idea of teaming itself or share similar philosophies of learning, teams may be doomed before they even begin working together.

My own team lacked some of these ingredients which I feel hindered its potential. Taking into account my own assumptions about my team and the fact that three of six team members were replaced this summer, the questions I attempt to answer with my research are:

1. How do team teachers understand interdisciplinary teaming in a middle level context?
2. What are the patterns or characteristics of an interdisciplinary team?
3. How do teams define success and negotiate the culture of teaming?
4. How can a team be more effective?
5. What effect does the introduction of new team members have on a team?

I feel there is a gap on our team between reality and potential. As an ethnographer, I observed the community of my team, 8 Orange, at team meetings, listened and interacted naturally while tape recording meetings. At times I took fieldnotes when I was unable to record discussions. I interviewed both informally during
one on one discussions, and more formally during question and answer sessions in order to gain insight into individual teachers’ perspectives. I also gathered and analyzed artifacts such as the principal’s recent memo of “school goals” which include a section on teaming. Finally, I accurately documented my own role as a team member by listing my activities and describing interactions with teammates while reflecting on this process. By walking the reader through each step of my influence on the team, I can differentiate the possible changes which occur due to personality and philosophy and my introduction of research to the team.

I am more confident than ever that the originators of interdisciplinary teaming were correct in believing that teams could benefit students more than individual teachers. Even though I’ve been frustrated by the lack of progress on my team, we have been able to accomplish many things which would have been difficult for the individual teacher such as a successful “Colonial Day” unit and culminating events, a shared philosophy and implementation of student behavior, both positive (team barbeque as an incentive) and negative (team behavior contract.) However, teaming does not occur by putting together teachers from various disciplines and giving them time to plan. Effective teaming looks like a community of teachers working, growing and learning together but comes only when they are willing to put forth the necessary time and effort. After spending a semester observing the “new” team and comparing it with the “old,” my research does not uncover what makes teachers more effective since each of my old teammates were successful teachers in their own right. Instead, in answering my research questions I hope to share with teamed teachers and administrators who plan on teaming the struggle
of one team and the effect of personality, philosophy and action research on interdisciplinary teaming.

After a full two years of fieldnotes, interviews and observations, Team 8 Orange has given me a unique opportunity to not only study the team but make an impact on it as well. Interdisciplinary teaming is unique because it throws together teachers with various personalities, philosophies and disciplines and asks them to work together as an effective group. My goal as a participant-observer on Team 8 Orange is to gain a better understanding of this unique group of people. When six teachers come together every day and work as closely as teamed teachers do, how do they act toward one another and negotiate everything from how to teach and discipline students to celebrating each others birthdays? While teacher birthdays may seem insignificant compared to the larger educational questions, the social interaction of the group impacts on how they make daily decisions which in turn impact the students. Secondly, I would be overjoyed if my role as a researcher can have a positive impact on the team itself as I ask questions and share data. Other teachers, administrators and researchers with an investment in teaming can then use this study to understand the daily inner-working of an interdisciplinary team and make decisions about how they can be moved forward.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW OF INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAMING

2.1 Introduction/ Definition of Teaming

What amazes me about interdisciplinary teaming is the amount of research available, the number of studies and careful scrutiny to every detail concerning interdisciplinary teams which can be found in book after book, article after article. Researchers, teachers, administrators, and universities since the late 1950’s and earlier (though without the “teaming” label) consider nearly every angle of the philosophies behind teams and the formation of a team of teachers working together with the same core group of students. All of the problems, uncertainties, and frustrations I’ve felt as a Language Arts teacher on team have already been realized by other teachers in similar situations. Yet since teachers fills so many roles, research and theory sometimes take a backseat to practice, even if that practice is ineffective.

Teachers can become overwhelmed with the practicalities of paperwork, the challenges of the real world of daily public education, the need to integrate special education and inclusion, parent-conferences, field trips, after-school activities, teaching social responsibility, the gifted-component, guidance, effective groups, scaffolding, multiple intelligences, literature circles, writing workshop, a classroom webpage, a class café, integrating technology, differentiated instruction, individualized attention, student conferences, behavior contracts, fundraising, mandatory yet useless meetings, teaching flex in-services, defending decisions, grading, and effective discipline just to name a few. Through interdisciplinary teaming, teachers from various disciplines bring together
individual strengths, knowledge and teaching styles. Together, teamed teachers can
tackle the broad range of expectations that define the teaching profession.

The term interdisciplinary is used in this paper to refer both to interdisciplinary
teaming and interdisciplinary curriculum. Interdisciplinary curriculum can be defined as
a curriculum which engages more than one discipline. Engagement in this type of
curriculum is referred to as curriculum integration. Though each compliments the other,
they are distinct categories. Different configurations of interdisciplinary teams exist, but
common to each is a core group of students and shared planning time.

2.2 History of Teaming

Although the origins of team teaching are not new, the formal label is
approximately forty-five years old (Heller 5). “Team teaching is rather unique among
current educational treads in that it seems to have received its original stimulus and much
of its continuing energy from certain universities” (Anderson 173). Teaming began at
Franklin Elementary School in Massachusetts in 1957 with Harvard’s School and
University Program for Research and Development (SUPRAD) conceived by Francis
Keppel and Judson T. Shaplin and directed by Robert H. Anderson. By 1956-57, the
movement spread to several hundred communities throughout the country (Shaplin 1).
While teaming in elementary school began with SUPRAD, Dr. Lloyd Trump of the
National Association of Secondary School Principals, provided the leadership to
popularize the team approach on the high school level (Heller 5). In 1961, Joseph
Estabrok School was one of the first in the country to be specifically designed as a team-
teaching school (Davis 14). In the summer of 1963, William M. Alexander, during a
seminar at Cornell University, first articulated a new type of school to address the needs
of young adolescents; this middle school concept has come to be characterized by several organizational and curricular characteristics which were to be organized around interdisciplinary teams (Dickinson & Erb 29).

Though some attribute the idea of teaming even back to the turn of the century, it took root rapidly during the latter part of the Twentieth century and coincided naturally with the middle school concept. The term “team” over the years has been used interchangeably with a variety of group arrangements, but the basic requirements are the same: a group of teachers share a core group of students and common planning time with the goal of improving instruction. The term interdisciplinary, whether it applies to teaching, teams or curriculum, though used in a variety of ways, for my purposes most closely aligns with Vars definition which emphasizes the connections and interrelations among various areas of knowledge (Vars, intro.)

2.3 Interdisciplinary Teaming Rationale/Benefits

Team teaching is not new; there is little in team teaching that has not been researched and evaluated in some way in connection with and apart from the team teaching per se (Heller 43). We value collaboration as it applies to students in the form of groups working together for a common goal; why should we value it any less for teachers? Some see the possibilities for collaboration as one of the main benefits of teaming. Working together, team members enjoy support from fellow professionals. In teaming, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Arbor & Schamber 18). Given common planning time, teaming offers educators time to exercise their own cooperative strategies, ask questions of colleagues, and negotiate philosophy and instructional methods.
In 1964, M. Delbert Lobb suggested: “The keystone in a rationale for team
teaching is the belief that the total accomplishment of the group can be greater than the
sum of the talents of the individual teachers. It is the hope that the cooperative endeavor,
the synergy, will produce results that are greater and more far-reaching than isolated
individual efforts (8). Teams can include teachers with specialized knowledge and skills
in a given area of the curriculum (Drake 59).

Team building can be the beginning of collegiality where none existed. When
teachers are empowered to make decisions regarding the instruction of students, in
conjunction with collegiality, it can help foster a climate of receptivity and openness
(Maeroff 9). Non-teamed teaching within given disciplines lends itself toward isolation
in various forms: instructionally, professionally, and even personally. Crossing the
boundaries of discipline, teaming validates the need and sometimes desire for teachers to
discuss with their colleagues how to best serve the needs of their students.

Since many team models exist, including that of my own team of six cross-
disciplined 8th grade teachers, it should be noted that in discussing the rationale for
teaming I use the definition of teaming as it engages in interdisciplinary curriculum
planning. Much of the teaming literature presupposes curriculum planning; discussion
of teams not engaging in planning curriculum exists mainly in the context of teaming
problems.

Reporting on interdisciplinary teaming at Easton Area High School in 1966,
Jessica H. Peterson concluded that the concept of team teaching gave sufficient promise
of breaking down the artificial barriers institutionalized education was placing between
teachers and students and between teacher and teacher to warrant building the new
This highlights the idea that interdisciplinary teaming and interdisciplinary curriculum are not always directly connected, though the connection is what strengthens a rationale for creating and maintaining teams.

In *We Gain More Than We Give: Teaming in Middle Schools*, Dickinson & Erb refer both to the importance of teacher collaboration and the role of interdisciplinary curriculum in teaming: “The joint planning of curriculum of teachers with different perspectives, backgrounds and learning and teaching styles leads to more effective instructional experiences for student (Dickinson & Erb 52). Since we learn by making connections, crossing human-created disciplinary boundaries makes sense, as much sense as giving teachers the opportunity to work together to break those boundaries. “By teaching relationships educators will be asking students to use a whole range of cognitive processes; it is by engaging in these processes that human knowledge can expand” (Drake 42).

Working collaboratively and cooperatively, modeling both processes for students, teamed teachers have the ability to reach students on more levels than any one individual within a given discipline. Citing case studies on various teams, Harold Davis concludes, “Teachers see the opportunities for professional growth as one of the greatest advantages of the team approach” (59). However, a host of benefits aside from the opportunity to engage in INC await teamed teachers.

Lobb summarizes a 1962 report on the staff utilization program by Premont Union High School District, Sunnyvale, California, by listing the advantages of what he calls “staff utilization.” Though dated, many of the benefits for teaming remain the same. The list includes:

1. More preparation time for teachers
2. Greater variety in methods and materials.
3. More detailed and careful lesson planning.
4. Greater use of audio-visual equipment.
5. Utilization of individual talents of team members.
6. More professional use of teacher’s time.
7. Tendency for more creative teaching because of interaction among team members.
8. Capability of meeting different educational problems because of flexibility of class size.
10. More extensive utilization of course content as well as self-evaluation by teachers.

Lobb refers to “meeting different educational problems because of the flexibility of class size” as a benefit on INT. When teaming, teachers can not only vary their instructional methods, but also their modes of delivery. For example, large group instruction gives the students an opportunity to adjust their social behavior patterns in a way that is appropriate for being in a large group (Davis 19). Teaming makes feasible instructional delivery methods such as small group instruction, large group instruction, independent study, and combinations of each—the possibilities are endless.

While Lobb was writing at the beginning of the educational movement toward teaming, Dickinson and Erb in 1997 cite three studies over the past decade that have provided empirical evidence that teaming does have a positive effect on student performance (526). Gable and Manning agree: “The generative efforts of collaboration can benefit all students, as educators work together to eliminate ineffective classroom practices and to address the differentiated instructional needs of a heterogeneous
population of students” (185). In order for the benefits to take place, however, teachers must swing open their doors to teammates and recognize that since all students learn differently, their singular visions for all may need to be re-evaluated and possibly changed.

### 2.4 Interdisciplinary Teaming and Curriculum Connections

While interdisciplinary teaming has been implemented in various settings, many associate it with the “middle school philosophy” which stemmed from a desire to rethink ways in which young adolescents learn. The knowledge that adolescents have their own particular characteristics and needs should assist middle school staff members in planning the school’s organizational pattern, styles of instructional delivery, and the kinds of experiences it wants for students (Jenkins & Tanner, 59). Moss & Fuller clearly link adolescent learning and interdisciplinary curriculum: “To maximize adolescent learning, curriculum should be taught through an interdisciplinary, thematic approach. Learners derive meaning when they can see relational patterns” (276).

Susan Drake, citing Eisner and Beane, point out that disciplines were artificially created by humans and that as early at the 1920s there was an educational movement to integrate the curriculum through themes (2). We make sense of the world as an integrated unit: through science we understand the environment, yet our surroundings have a history, one that may involve people and culture. One does not exist without the other. Yet in schools we attempt to separate these disciplines into subject areas.

Since its conception, teaming began as a way to integrate curriculum. One can exist without the other (Dickson 5). Erb cites curriculum theorists who concede that interdisciplinary teaming is practiced in some form in far more places than is
interdisciplinary curriculum (52). However, Erb stresses that the joint planning of curriculum by teachers with different perspectives, backgrounds, learning and teaching styles leads to more effective instructional experiences for students (52). Though there are times in may be necessary to organize information through the lens of specialized subject areas, it makes more sense to organize curriculum as it mirrors real life. Humans exist in a dynamic world where learners need to take an active role. As Paulo Freire puts it, “We need to be subjects of history, even if we cannot totally stop being objects of history” (199). We live and should learn integratively. Interdisciplinary teaming and curriculum compliment each other; when joined with team teaching, as it often is, integrated teaching increases the intellectual resources and support available to both students and teachers (Jenkins & Tanner 27).

2.5 Teaming Problems

In their introduction Dickinson and Erb outline the problem of teaming as it relates to integrated planning and instruction:

While thousands of teaching teams are enhancing school and classroom life, too many teams have remained paralyzed by a limited vision of what teaming can and should be, naïve notions about the perils of collaboration, authoritative postures of leadership, and sketchy understandings about the rewards of thriving teams. Some of these teams were born in name only and never ventured to be more than an entitled unit. . . Still other are dying a slow, steady death as they battle conflicting visions, inadequate support, fading momentum, and little sense about just how to grow over time.” (xii)
Gordon Vars, a respected voice in interdisciplinary education, agrees that if team planning meetings are so taken up with ways to deal with troublesome students, little time will be left to consider interdisciplinary instruction (11.) Without the desire to learn, a shared philosophy, and administrative support, teams will remain in the first stage of their development, sharing problems they have with students, attending joint parent meetings, and completing other administrative tasks.

Lack of administrative support can also delay or even stunt team growth. Yet while administrative support may be a problem at some schools, the problems on my team mirror the ones Olds describes: “Curiously enough, it is an observed fact that teams do far more than administration to restrict these possibilities” (115). The possibilities he refers to are those of organizational flexibility. Some teachers, not unlike students, unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the power to institute change rely on the status quo instead. Rather than using common planning time for curriculum integration, teams may begin to use it for “administrative tasks” instead. Jerry Rottier believes that teams must begin to demonstrate that their common planning time can be used not only for discussion of students and housekeeping chores but also to improve instructional and curricular practices (214). He also believe that knowledge of how to move from subject-centered to curriculum integration with colleagues is a skill which must be learned. “The experimental stage of teaming is over,” he continues, “at the present time, however, most teams seem to be content with minimal progress. Part of that hesitancy to change is the result of a lack of knowledge of what can be done, part of it reflects a lack of leadership within the school, and part of it is due to a lack of quality staff development programs (217). However, in the context of interdisciplinary teaming and curriculum, change is
necessary; if teachers’ instructional methods do not change along with work group enhancement, little impact on student outcomes may be seen (Crow & Pounder 254).

Professional development may be necessary to help teams focus more on curricular coordination and integration versus management tasks and student intervention (Crow and Pounder 233.) Without in-service education on the interdisciplinary team concept, schools will remain at an impasse and eventually die out altogether. Since most teachers have not received training specific to middle school, it makes sense to educate middle school teachers; a host of issues exist for them to research, negotiate and implement when it comes to interdisciplinary instruction, curriculum and teaming. In order for teachers to team effectively, after they understand the theory and commit themselves to the process, they need to acquire the basic skills, knowledge and experience since teaching an interdisciplinary curriculum is a high level professional activity that relies on teachers of different subject areas collaborating with each other (Dickinson and Erb 42.) Erb & Doda warn against attempt[s] to team without adequate staff development in such aspects as team skills (communication, group decision making, and organization of effective meetings) and teaching practices (goal setting, record keeping, evaluation) (116).

Other problems face teams even before they begin to plan. While teaming allows professionals to bring together different beliefs and ideas, they also have different personalities as well. And though some believe personality should not matter, maturity certainly does. “As long as the members of a team do not show conflicts of interest and do not vie for the favor of their pupils, the situation can be workable. The maturity of the teachers is far more important than the maturity of the students” (Lobb 9.) For example,
team business being conducted “behind the backs” of other team members is risky at best. Such practices erode the trust level between team members, but they can also create situations which become blatantly antagonistic. Other practices can negatively effect teaming’s good intentions. Team plans should not be shared with students until all plans are complete and all members of the team are ready to present them to students. “Sneak previews” may be popular with the students, but they can erode the bonds of teaming; team members who do this are not perceived as team players. (Arbor & Schamber 9, 12). There is a balance that must be struck concerning team members’ involvement. While it is possible to be “too involved” to the point of being overzealous, it is imperative that all team members be included in team decision making. Failure to participate in team decisions constitutes being part of the problem as opposed to being part of the solution (Arbor & Schamber 19).

Group skills are ones which teachers often teach their students. With teaming, the roles are reversed. Working together collaboratively, teams are learning the same skills that have been widely promoted as cooperative learning for students, and “conflict will be experienced as individuals negotiate meaning to establish a norm” (Drake 17). Working with various teams, Drake heard the word “frustrated” as echoed through people’s stories, especially when they felt ready to move on but others did not. Stress is normal at this stage, but Drake emphasizes that others in similar situations feel the same thing (25).

Despite the potential problems teams face, however, when teachers take full advantage of team organization, communications patterns within a school change, teachers’ involvement in decision making improves, instruction better serves the needs of
students, the curriculum is transformed, and teachers find the practice of their profession more rewarding (Shaplin & Olds 8).

2.6 Teaming Methods

To avoid such problems as mentioned above, each discussion on teaming must begin at the same starting point, goals shared by the team. The curriculum goals, as Olds points out, should change each year. Teachers should not assume the curriculum goals of the team are the same as the individual teacher. “Such an assumption has been invariably been proven to be naïve. When the teachers get together, they find that they haven’t considered carefully the reasons for their own actions. With this realization a movement for change is started, and substantive coordination becomes the major concern of the team (121). Teacher teams should have objectives and goals when they make decisions about how students learn. Research indicates that teachers who engage in team teaching must be able to work together harmoniously toward mutually acceptable ends through mutually acceptable means (Davis 6).

Brazee & Capelluti realize the importance of teamed teachers coming to common understandings and shared beliefs which provide the philosophical underpinnings for actual planning an integrative experience (199). They list a series of questions teams may discuss in order to develop a theoretical base before they begin to integrate and plan together. I’ve listed these questions because I also believe in the importance of negotiating common understandings about learning before effective teaming practices, including interdisciplinary curriculum discussions, can take place.

- What is the purpose of a middle level curriculum?
- What skills, knowledge, competencies, and attitudes should receive priority?
• Are some subjects or areas of study more important than others? If so, what are they?
• What should the learning outcomes of a middle level education be?
• Who should determine the curriculum?
• Should we have different curricula for students with different interests and aspirations?
• How should learning be organized?
• What are the philosophical bases for the curriculum?
• Shall everyone have access to the same curriculum?
• How will be measure worthwhile learning?
• What beliefs do teachers hold about how much can be learned and who can learn? Who is responsible for student learning?
• Who should be active participants in the learning process?
• Are there some subjects which integrate more easily?
• Are there some individuals who can not be successful in school?
• Are there some teachers for who integrative curriculum will not work? (112-114)

Whether by answering questions such as these, or by simply discussing curricular and team goals, teams understand their motivations behind both individual and team decisions. And at the heart of each decision should be the students. While seemingly obvious, an alarming number of teachers make decisions based on their own needs rather than the needs of their students. The common goal should be simple, keeping their focus on helping students succeed (Kew 39).
Another common thread in the discussion of effective teaming is the necessity for team members to divide and conquer. Kew says, “Effective teams divide duties so that more cooperation and collaboration can be achieved to meet students’ needs” (39). The teachers must identify team members’ roles. They must be sure, individually and collectively, that each person understands her/his role as well as the roles of the other team members (Davis 10). Assigning roles aligns with one of teaming major benefits, utilizing individual strengths. As Heller puts it, “The team grows stronger when its members recognize and acknowledge one another’s’ strengths and understand and empathize with one another’s concerns (67).

In addition to group skills, shared goals, curriculum revision, and maturity, letting go of old beliefs is probably the most difficult challenge facing teams. Drake lists some of these beliefs and explains each. Teachers fear that students won’t learn basic skills, yet basic skills can and should be built into the team curriculum. Others feel content is the most important factor in learning, but soon realize that content becomes a vehicle for essential learning and not and end to be achieved. Similarly, these same teachers feel that their course content will not be covered. However, by integrating existing course content a more selective targeting of the prescribed content makes it more relevant. These are just some of the beliefs teachers must re-evaluate and stop using as an excuse for not integrating curriculum. Drake even suggests that some teachers have found that course content can be more effectively covered through integration (13). With someone looking over their shoulder as is the case on teams, teachers tend to begin re-evaluating their teaching techniques and work harder at staying current and open to new ideas.
Time is a valuable commodity in any area and certainly one in interdisciplinary teaming. Whether it’s the duration a team has been together or the time a team spends on dedicating itself to interdisciplinary curriculum planning, time is seen as a critical factor. “There seems to be two categories that are critical to team maturity: regular planning time and team longevity” (White 87). Deborah Thomas discusses the various implications of time. She points to Mercer Middle School in Garden City, Georgia where the teachers receive a two-period team planning block (94). She cites Merenbloom (1988) who asserts that teams need to spend a minimum of two or three weekly periods planning together in order to function effectively (96). Curriculum integration takes a lot of time if done correctly. Of this fact there does not appear to be much debate.

Another benchmark for mature teams is that they are curriculum risk-takers. “They are not overly concerned with standardized testing; scores seem to take care of themselves” (Jones 214.) With the frenzy of standardized testing upon us, many teachers feel pressured to abandon their research, teaching techniques and what they know about learning and “teach to the test.” This uninspiring and unfortunate phenomenon does not bode well for the success of interdisciplinary teams concerned more with creating and assessing their own students than someone else’s.
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW OF INTERDISCIPLINARY CURRICULUM

3.1 Introduction and Definition

Interdisciplinary curriculum refers to the integration of disciplines. However, no one definition of interdisciplinary curriculum exists. In reality, an integrated curriculum can consist of various numbers of teachers or any combination of disciplines. The word discipline is used to refer to subject areas such as math or science. There is also a distinction between such terms as integration, interdisciplinary or cooperative teaching.

Different categories of interdisciplinary instruction exist. The following definitions or levels of integration are taken from Thomas Erb and Nancy Doda’s Team Organization: Promise, Practice and Possibilities.

Level one can be labeled preintegration. . . For example, teachers organized on teams can alter their teaching schedules to provide for field trips, films/videos, outside speakers, teamwide assemblies, or laboratory experiences. Level two might be called coordinated or overlap teaching. Coordinated teaching refers to the practice of teaching related topics, lessons or units at the same time. . . The third level on the integration continuum can be labeled cooperative teaching. This level requires two or more teachers to make changes in how they teach some topic in order to mutually reinforce their various subjects. . . The interdisciplinary thematic unit takes the level of joint planning and integration of subject matter a step further. (99)
Imogene Forte and Sandra Schurr summarize interdisciplinary instruction as valuable because:

- It reduced the fragmentation of learning which can result from a traditional junior high school schedule.
- It facilitates the teaching of thinking and interpersonal skills that are often overlooked in conventional instruction.
- It helps students develop a unified view of their education.
- It empowers teachers by providing opportunities to work together.
- Students learn and remember best when learning is connected.
- The world around us is an interdisciplinary world; life is not divided into separate disciplines. (301)

In the real world, disciplines overlap; facts and events are situated in contexts. The study of those facts as separate from their context which occurs in a non-integrated curriculum further disassociates school discourse from the real world. John Dewey advocates integrated learning in this way in his essays on The Child and the Curriculum:

Again, in school each of these subjects is classified. Facts are torn away from their original place in experience and rearranged with reference to some general principle. Classification is not a matter of child experience; things do not come to the individual pigeon-holed. . . There is no such thing as sheer self-activity possible--because all activity takes place in a medium, in a situation, and with reference to its conditions (274-278).

As James Beane, a prominent voice in the advancement of the “middle school philosophy” points out in A Middle School Curriculum from Rhetoric to Reality,
disciplines were artificially created by humans to organize their world and were often defined by political needs (2). We make sense of the world as an integrated unit: through science we understand the environment, yet our surroundings have a history, one that involves people and culture. One does not exist without the other. Yet in schools we attempt to separate these disciplines into subject areas.

There is a definitive separation between school and reality; in the real world, we do not wake up in the morning and do social studies for fifty minutes. The adolescent begins to realize that in real life we encounter problems and situations, gather data from all of our resources, and generate solutions. The fragmented school day does not reflect this reality (Jacobs 1). Dickinson and Erb agree: “Most often, life comes to us in terms of questions, problems, and issues. Insight frequently consists of seeing the connectedness of ideas and phenomena (229).

Dewey advocates learning in this way. He says, “Now see to it that day by day the conditions are such that their own activities move inevitably in this direction, toward such culmination of themselves. Let the child's nature fulfill its own destiny, revealed to you in whatever of science and art and industry the world now holds as its own” (278). As Stephen Tchudi puts it, interdisciplinary study is inextricably tied to inquiry learning, where students seek answers to questions which they see as important. And given an opportunity to raise questions and a degree of autonomy in setting priorities, kids do raise significant questions (38). Jessica Smith, in an article which addresses standards through curriculum integration, writes that learning becomes more meaningful when it is relevant to the real lives of the children it serves and when students can make meaning and
connections for themselves. Curriculum integration, she believes, allows students to see the ‘whole’ rather than the ‘parts’” (5).

3.2 Benefits of Interdisciplinary Curriculum and Instruction

A major benefit of interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction, then, is helping students see value in what they learn, allowing them to connect their lives to the curriculum, and to connect the curriculum to their lives. Crossing the boundaries we’ve created makes sense because it more accurately reflects reality. Since we know students learn by making connections, we must move to an interactive level of learning where we can help students integrate their prior knowledge and background experiences with the topic of study so that new and personal stories emerge. Learning occurs when the learner has a vested interest in the course of study, and not before (Tchundi 56).

Curriculum integration, when connected to students’ lives, can move beyond acquiring skills to provide a forum where issues related to national and global concerns, such as social justice and the distribution of wealth, can be explored. . . on a more local level, connections in an integrated curriculum frequently occur between the school and its surrounding community (Weilbacher 19).

In addition to allowing students as active participants in curriculum development to make connections to their lives, past experiences and various disciplines, there are other benefits of curriculum integration. Jenkins and Tanner agree that the most striking difference between the rebirth of integrated curriculum and the past is the realization that all knowledge is in some way interrelated and that learning can be made more efficient through a process that recognizes these interrelationships (101). They also understand that because of the knowledge explosion it is impossible to learn all there is to know in
any one discipline. Organizing the school curriculum around major themes, ideas, and problems may not only be more sensible from the point of view of student learning, but also from the point of view of survival. (101). So in addition to allowing students to see connections to their lives and the real world, an integrated curriculum helps them to see patterns and make connections across discipline boundaries.

The internet has changed our ability to gather an exchange knowledge. Because of the growth of knowledge, we need to rethink ways we select the various areas of study. Knowledge will not stop growing and schools are bursting at the seams (Jacobs 4). As curriculum planners revise what they think students should know, and as teachers struggle to cover content, curriculum integration offers a solution. “Integration, by reducing duplication of both skills and content, begins to allows us to teach more. It also gives us a new perspective on what constitutes basic skills” (Drake 2). Working together, teachers can both reinforce and compliment their individual disciplines. “There is a need to actively show students how different subject areas influence their lives, and it is critical that students see the strength of each discipline perspective in a connected way” (Jacobs 5).

3.3 **Interdisciplinary Curriculum and Teaming**

While it is true that curriculum integration aides students in making connections between disciplines, in a middle school setting this requires teachers to work together to achieve a common goal. A team teaching arrangement, with teachers of various disciplines all teaching the same students, gives teachers an opportunity to align curriculum. Team teachers have the option to collectively target key instructional goals.
For example, teams might begin to identify cross-subject skills and habits they would like to foster in the students they have in common (Erb & Dod 95).

Created in 1984, the Coalition of Essential Schools includes 100 schools across the country, rethinking pedagogy and redesigning schools. The coalition found that when joined with team teaching, as it most often is, integrated teaching the intellectual resources and support to both students and teachers” (Jenkins & Tanner 27). It is possible for a single teacher to involve various disciplines, combining “experts” from various subject areas and giving them common planning time to develop everything from a common vocabulary to fully integrated lessons provides an unequaled arena for learning.

Working together, team members enjoy support from fellow professionals. In teaming, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (Arbor & Schamber 18). Given common planning time, teaming offers educators time to exercise their own cooperative strategies, ask questions of colleagues, and negotiate philosophy and instructional methods. While team teaching in middle school has become a fairly common practice, the concept of teaming as it relates to interdisciplinary curriculum must not stop with early and middle level education; strong evidence suggests that the separate subject approach is as inappropriate for high school students as it is for middle level students, yet it continues to dominate the way curriculum is organized because it is so deeply rooted in our experience and in the structures which underlie the schooling system (Brazee and Capelluti 21).

With team teaching a fairly common practice and middle school philosophy prompting new ways of dealing with 13-15 year olds, middle schools are fertile ground
for interdisciplinary curriculum to take place. “The knowledge that adolescents have their own particular characteristics and needs should assist middle school staff members in planning the school’s organizational pattern, styles of instructional delivery, and the kinds of experiences it wants for students (Jenkins & Tanner 59). With a new understanding of middle levels needs, secondary educators must recognize the best instructional methods and organizational structures may look different than a traditional one teacher, one classroom approach and instead like a team of teachers making connections between disciplines and helping students make connections as well.

With teams of teachers as an organizational structure supporting curriculum integration, why is the co-existence of the two an exception rather than a rule? Based on a study of four middle school teachers who used interdisciplinary or integrative curriculum but have since returned in part to more traditional instructional methods, Gary Weilbacher concludes that teachers who want to organize their curriculum in an integrative manner are having difficulty maintaining their commitments because of the time it requires to plan, implement, assess, and defend (25). Unlike the teaching of a traditional discipline-based curriculum, integration does not have an inherent scope and sequence; there is no general structure in interdisciplinary work (Jacobs 2). When teachers from various disciplines, each with his or her own philosophy of learning, methods and ideas about how best to integrate, it takes considerable time to negotiate curriculum, even for teachers in schools lucky enough to have team planning time. Also, teachers using curriculum integration as an organizing center are more likely to find themselves defending their choices. In fact, a large scale evaluation study conducted in three states focusing in one particular study on parental knowledge of teacher-practices
found that of all the middle school practices, the least familiar to parents is integrative lessons (Mulhall, Mertens and Flowers 59).

3.4 Problems and Methods

Before devoting the time to integration, teachers themselves must understand its benefits and be willing to invest the time. This often is difficult for many teachers since they must be willing to give up some control over the content of the curriculum and allow students to co-create the curriculum in partnership with them (Erlandson & McVittie 35). A well-designed integrative unit meets the needs of varying abilities, involves student-choice, and uses differentiated measures of assessment. Curriculum change is difficult because it is highly personal. It requires a fundamental shift in individual beliefs about what the curriculum should be and how it can best be experienced. Therefore, any attempts at altering present curriculum must involve and intensive examination of a number of fundamentally held beliefs before something new can be explored (Brazee and Capelluti 112).

Organizational change is just the beginning: middle school level leaders and teachers who were successful in bringing about structural/organizational change in their schools must now exert the same degree of commitment, dedication, and enthusiasm to improving curriculum, assessment and instruction (Clark and Clark 55).

Implementation of interdisciplinary curriculum is dependent of the level of integration; teachers should be active curriculum designers and determine the nature and degree of integration and the scope and sequence of the study (Forte and Schurr 9). Focus should be given to areas strengthened by integration such as relationships among subjects, groups process skills, higher-order thinking, self-esteem building, and other
legitimate instructional objectives that go beyond the limits of any one subject area to provide an integrated focus for the unit (Erb and Doda 111). Richard Lear agrees, citing case studies of three essential school that in order for integrated teaching to succeed, that teachers need to rethink curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment in fundamental ways—an opportunity rarely afforded to them in other circumstances (Jenkins and Tanner 36).

3.5 Conclusions

For authentic integration to occur, teachers also must work with local professionals, along with early adolescents and community representatives, to gather information about the concerns of early adolescents, carefully study social issues and problems, and subsequently identify possible curriculum themes and related activities (Beane 53).

To develop interdisciplinary lessons, teachers and curriculum planners work through various stages such as choosing a topic, developing questions, webbing and brainstorming, identifying research questions, finding resources, intellectual scavenging or brainstorming places where answers to questions might be found and finally conducting research, synthesizing and sharing knowledge (Tchudi 38-44).

While curriculum integration takes many forms, the desire to more authentically replicate real-life learning, reduce discipline fragmentation, make connections between disciplines and encourage critical thinking motivates curriculum designers and underlies most interdisciplinary models. And while research supports interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction, the time it takes to plan and implement must be justified by teachers willing to defend their non-mainstreamed practices and forgo traditional models of instruction and assessment as they re-think curriculum and redesign learning objectives.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Ethnographic Case Study

One of the original intentions for interdisciplinary teaming included a desire to create micro societies within schools. As small communities, teams create identities complete with characteristics, vocabulary, rules and other aspects of community which led me to study teaming ethnographically. Because this study involves one individual culture, it is an ethnographic case study. Michael Patton defines case studies, which in involved one unit of analysis only, “[They] can be individuals, organizations, cultures, regions or nation states” (447).

“Ethnographic inquiry takes as its guiding assumption that any human group of people interacting together for a period of time will evolve a culture” (Patton 81).

Teachers on Team 8 Orange work together five days a week for seven and a half hours a day. During that time, we spend a minimum of seventy minutes together, more often closer to two hours not including after school or social events. During this time, the team begins to form a micro-society within the school culture, with routines and vocabulary unique to the team. At one meeting in the fall of 2004, the following conversation took place:

Luke: Do you guys think a WAMI is a possibility or this week?
Nathan: Forget the WAMI, a team ream is in order for a bunch of kids.
Luke: Llamar, what do you think?
Llamar: Let’s do a catch all and do both at once.

Only teammates would understand the conversation that took place, the vocabulary unique even to other teams in the school. A WAMI, an acronym for Wednesday A.M. Inspection, takes place unannounced during study hall. Teachers take the students to
clean out their lockers and then to the auditorium to help organize students books, notebooks and planners. A team ream refers to the team of teachers discussing an issue with a student. While criticisms of ethnography, such as validity and researcher bias, exist, Denzin still believes, “In terms of analysis and interpretation of research results, ethnography adds a cultural dimension that is likely to be absent in other approached” (408). As a participant and researcher on the team, I was able to gain entrance easily and study closely the culture of one interdisciplinary middle-school team. Patton testifies to the benefits of participant as researcher, “In participant observation the evaluator shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the people in the program. The purpose of such participation is to develop an insider’s view of what is happening. This means that the evaluator not only sees what is happening but feels what it is like to be part of the group” (75).

The field work in this study consists of interviews, observations and artifacts I’ve collected during the last two and a half years as a member of Team 8 Orange. As David Fetterman explains, “Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture which may be of a small tribal group in an exotic land or a classroom in middle-class suburbia” (1998). In my case, the group is located in a classroom within a suburban school, Roaring Brook Intermediate School (RBIS) located in Northeast Pennsylvania. With over 10,000 students and nearly 1,500 support staff, the district is one of the fastest growing in Pennsylvania. Roaring Brook School District is spread over 200 square miles with most students transported to school bus. Entrance to the field was not an issue since the group I studied was my own team of teachers. I did not face some of the difficulties other ethnographers confront such as “understanding the language, deciding on how to
present oneself, locating an informant, [and] establishing rapport” (Denzin 366). While I did collect empirical materials, another challenges mentioned by Denzin, because of my unique situation as a team member, were not a problem. Negotiating the study and gaining agreement from the team to participate were my only hurdles early in the study.

4.2 Research Process

I began researching interdisciplinary teaming by reading books and articles on interdisciplinary teaming, curriculum and other subjects related to teaming. Articles and books were gathered from Penn State University library, University of Scranton library, various bookstores, conferences, and the internet. The literature review chapters include a compilation of many of these resources. The purpose of collecting and analyzing data was to study the participants’ attitudes and actions as they relate to interdisciplinary teaming. Since teaming is a necessary part of our identity as middle level educators at Roaring Brook Intermediate School, I thought it would be interesting to gain a deeper understanding of teaming. I wanted to know what patterns or characteristics exist in teaming as well as understand how teams could be more effective. When new team members were added to Team 8 Orange this year, I also wondered what effect new teachers would have on an existing team. By reading what others have written about interdisciplinary teaming, I was able to view my own team through the perspective of existing teams and team models which exist in theory.

I began by separating articles and book excerpts into categories such as interdisciplinary teaming history, methods, problems etc. and the same with interdisciplinary curriculum. Originally intending to focus only on teaming, I began to realize curriculum could not be separated from teams as curriculum integration is one of
the main components and benefits of interdisciplinary teaming. I created a table of contents for each binder, along with a working bibliography and separate works cited later. In writing the literature reviews I constantly referred to these sources in addition to gathering new sources. Over the course of three years, and ready to write my own research, I made a conscious decision to stop gathering articles and focus instead on my own study, as interdisciplinary teaming and curriculum is an area which continues to produce research being a fairly new area educationally speaking.

After gathering, reading an interpreting research, I began to shift my focus to my own study. Using observation, interview and artifacts as data sources, I spent less and less time on others’ writing and more time gathering data. Other methods which may have been used in this study include questionnaire or survey more appropriate for a larger sample of team teachers. As an ethno graphic case study, interviews served the same purpose as these methods. Interviews allowed me to take patterns in observations and discuss them with the teachers. I was able to clarify comments and ask for explanations of actions and discuss philosophies which were not evident in observations.

I conducted two types of interviews, formal and informal. More formal interviews were pre-arranged, and I began the interview with questions from observations or research as I attempted to fill in the gaps of my study. These interviews lasted anywhere from 10-20 minutes each and were conducted with one teacher at a time. On my laptop I created a chart including date of interview, questions, person interviewed, location of interview, interview notes, and reflective notes. After each interview I immediately wrote down thoughts and questions which later often prompted additional interviews. All reflective notes were written in italics in order for me to differentiate
between direct answers my own thoughts. When interview were taped, I used the same chart as a guideline and later listen to the tape inserting notations into the chart in order to keep the research organized.

Informal interviews on the other hand were not pre-arranged. Discussions at meetings and during planning periods often prompted questions about my research or teaming in general; then I would ask questions from statements made by team members. Most often these interviews were conducted with more than one teacher at a time.

“During fieldwork, unstructured conversational interviews may occur in groups that are not all focused” (Patton 390). These interviews also included reflective notes which I wrote after the interview; these helped me to gather data which clarified and gave new insight into the actions of team members. “The period after the interview is critical to the rigor and validity of qualitative methods. This is a time for guaranteeing the quality of the data. On occasion this process of immediately reviewing the interview will reveal area of ambiguity or of uncertainty, where you are not really sure what the person said or meant” (Patton 139). Notes taken after interviews allowed me to further clarify their meaning. After two and a half years of conducting interviews, I separated them by year and team (A & B).

In addition to interviews, I used artifacts because they illuminated extensions of team meetings, products of discussion and served to offset statements made in interviews with facts. As Denzin states, “What people “say” is often very different from “what people do” (158). Artifacts help distinguish between talk and action. For example, I can compare a list of yearly school goals set by administration to an interview conducted with the principal concerning administrative support for teaming. I kept all artifacts in a
folder. Whenever the team planned a lesson, wrote a letter, or produced anything as a team which I was able to collect, I kept it unsure of its role later in the research.

While artifacts served as doors to unlock meaning, fieldnotes were the key. Fieldnotes taken through observation were the most utilized data collection method. At team meetings I took notes in a notebook and later on a laptop. Once a week I brought a tape recorder to the meetings and took notes afterward from the tapes. Other times I took notes after discussions which occurred during common planning periods, lunch, or after school. As Denzin suggests, despite criticism of researcher bias, direct observation plays an important role in qualitative research. “Although direct observation may be marred by researcher biases, at least these are consistent and known. Direct observation, when added to other research yielding depth and or breadth, enhances consistency and validity” (382).

Similar to the interview, I designed a chart on Microsoft Word which included a section for the date, location, notes, reflection and questions. I used a combination of notetaking directly on my laptop, handwritten notes which I later transferred into the laptop, or taping which I tried to transcribe weekly. Again, after more than two years of fieldnotes, I later separated the notes by year and team. Throughout the process of gathering data on my team, I complied hours of tapes and stacks of notes. For the most part, the process ran smoothly, my notes remained well-organized and using the data gathered I was never at a loss for questions and areas to observe and discuss with my teammates.

While much of the process proceeded efficiently, I did have some concerns about the qualitative research process. Problems with data collection methods included, in this
study, initial resistance to being studied by a fellow colleague. Participants, though initially uneasy about being tape recorded at meetings, eventually relaxed and became accustomed to notes and tapings. I reassured them I planned to use pseudonyms for all names. It was difficult also to find time for interviews. Since I was always present, there was a feeling I would be available any time to conduct interviews. More pressing matters throughout the school day constantly emerged and interviews were put on hold many times.

On seven occasions during the 2002-2003 school year, I asked for a meeting to sit and discuss my research hoping the insights would provide helpful ideas or tips on how to improve our team. I was careful to ask during times when no field trip or other major event was being planned. I also did not want to seem too much like the authority and was also careful to approach the team with ideas I found through them in my research. Despite my attempt beginning in December to gather the team for one meeting to discussing teaming, Nathan was the only person I was ever able to share any information with by the end of the school year (Fieldnotes 2002-2003).

Other issues arose during the research process because of my role as participant observer. Early in the study, it was evident my unique beliefs and understandings about teaming had to be separated from the observable data. Though I struggled to keep myself from the data, this drawback can also be considered an advantage of ethnographic studies: “Every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretative community that configures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act” (Denzin 30). However, at times I inserted judgments into observations without realizing until later they were not separated as intended.
4.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process. After observations I wrote notes in italics which represented my reflections of the observation. Every few months, I read the collected data and began to list categories which emerged as patterns formed. After collecting all data, I re-read or listened to every fieldnote, interview and artifact gathered to that point. I re-arranged and re-named categories based on my research questions and then began to code the data. Data was manually coded by color based on emergent patterns and categories. Initial categories included discussion topics, actions, times (including times members came to meeting or meeting start and end times), problems, personality conflicts, administration, and the research questions as categories.

Initially the notes from observations were compiled into charts separating dates, times, observations, comments and questions. Once charted, I mapped out categories which overlapped in multiple sources on a large whiteboard. I then discussed these categories with some team members and later re-name or re-organized the categories. I then color coded each category twice, once as it related to the research data and once as it related to the research questions. I then re-read all data highlighting information as it fit into the categories, labeling at the top of each page which categories the data included and which research question each pertained to. Once highlighted, I re-read again the data and began to make notes on the whiteboard again re-naming and shuffling the categories into larger clusters. The whiteboard, which was as large as half of my computer room wall, was separated into categories tied together by lines, as well as a list of emergent vocabulary. The research questions written at the top were also color coded with lines drawn to where each question tied to a particular category. With the highlighted notes
and whiteboard, I began to write summaries of each before I finally turned toward analyzing the data in writing. Similar to earlier in the process with the literature, I created a table of contents of all data color coded by the final categories which I include in this paper as components of effective teaming.

I then used these categories as an organizing center and began writing using thick description of the data as it related to each component. All reflective notes and personal opinions were left for Chapter 9 as I wove the description with value judgments of my team and its effectiveness. While judgments inevitably made their way into the whole of the study, from overt opinions to the words used to represent the data, I set aside the reflective notes from both interviews and fieldnotes until I finished describing each component. “A basic tenet of research admonishes careful separation of description from interpretation” (Patton 438). The interpretative chapter makes claims about teaming based on the data with reservations. Each team is unique. I believe, with different philosophies of teaming, no two teams strive to achieve the same goals aside from improving student achievement.

Michael Patton sums up the qualitative researchers’ responsibility of analyzing data:

The qualitative analyst’s effort uncovering patterns, themes, and categories includes using both creative and critical faculties in making carefully considered judgments about what is really significant and meaningful in the data. Since qualitative analysts do not have statistical test to tell them when an observation or pattern is significant, they must rely on their own intelligence, experience, and judgment; second, they
should take seriously the responses of those who were studied or participated in the inquiry; and third, the researcher or evaluator should consider the responses and reactions of those who read and review the results (467).

Taking this into account, after writing component chapters, I gave them to Nathan and asked him to look at them. While I shared data with the team throughout the process, Nathan later also read and commented on the analysis. He helped me clarify points and shed light on categories of effective teaming which I previously overlooked. After reading the analysis, he agreed it was descriptive of his experience on the team.

Unfortunately, with all other team A members moving on since the completion of the study, the others did not read the analysis. Some did see the data and notes, however, and at times expressed concern about whether the research would affect them negatively. One member said, “Let me see those [fieldnotes]. Did you just write down that I was late?” When the team member saw that I did indeed jot down the arrival times, as I noted at every meeting, they admonished, “That’s not making me look good” (Fieldnotes 2003). Other instances I was asked to remove data which I did with every request. With Team B, I share both the data and analysis on a regular basis. All have volunteered to help clarify statements and even revise the final copy.

Realizing my own bias coming into the study as an advocate of teaming, I remained careful to each position, including the textual positions and language choices I made to represent the data. I used notes team members took at meetings as well as various types of data to connect as many perspectives as possible on the same data. In order to create a dynamic description of one interdisciplinary team, I included sensory
impressions, direct quotations and constantly asked the questions, “What surprised me?”
and “What intrigued me?” I was aware of non-verbal communication, and even reflected
on my own body language in order to include myself in the study as a team member.
Even so, the story of Team 8 Orange is told through my research, meaning my viewpoint.
Having a closer relationship with Nathan than other team members, valuing his
judgments above others, and asking Nathan to help organize and exclude components is
one example which illustrates how my own bias as a team member excludes the
possibility of a completely objective data analysis. With this in mind, the study I
conducted with my team, 8 Orange, describes in detail the daily mechanizations of a team
of teachers attempting to negotiate interdisciplinary, middle-level teaming.
CHAPTER 5

EFFECTIVE TEAMING

5.1 Understanding Teaming

Teachers, administrators, individuals and teams all define teaming differently depending on their perspective, background and knowledge of interdisciplinary team teaching. My knowledge of teaming prior to being hired by Pocono Mountain was non-existent. I had never heard of or studied formally the teaming concept and was surprised in the interview when asked about the possibility of working on a team. Though I understood the concept of a team, I had no prior knowledge of teams as they related to education. Once hired, I was told my team members’ names and was surprised to learn one was a gentleman I graduated high school with six years earlier. At the first in-service meeting the principal introduced me to my team. My first impression was of being overwhelmed and confused at the prospect of teaming. After a few weeks I became extremely grateful for the team since they helped me with everything from filing paperwork to dealing with discipline problems. My first year, a learning experience, I relied on my team in every area except the curriculum which my mentor guided me through.

After three years of teaming, and a new graduate student who was being asked to think of a writing topic, I decided the single most important aspect of my day aside from teaching students related to the team. I saw, talked to, met with and socialized with Team 8 Orange every day. And though I had a pretty good understanding of what it meant to be a part of an interdisciplinary team, I began to wonder for the first time if we were doing it right. Did all teams think and act like my own? I also wanted to share with the
world my joy of the teaming concept, one which I relied on for the first three years of my professional life as a teacher. I decided to share my experiences with Team A and study other teams as comparisons.

A few months later the 2001-2002 school year began with an addition to the team, a new reading teacher, Laura. Just the year before our special education teacher was replaced by Kim. For the first time, I was not completely happy with the team and as the year progressed I became increasingly frustrated. The following year, Kim was replaced by Chrissy, and I continued to feel discontent as a team member. In previous years I would have defined teaming as a support group of professionals and friends. In 2002-2003 my position on teaming altered completely and my new definition of teaming included feelings of increased negativity and discontentment. The team stopped functioning as it had in previous years and my research will reflect this change.

Throughout the years my understanding of teams has changed dramatically. For me, teaming should make life for a teacher both easier and more productive while enhancing the education of students. I now understand teams as a group of people working together for a common goal. By this measure, a team can determine its effectiveness as it relates to both itself and students.

The idea of a team as a group of people working together for a shared goal is common among Team 8 Orange, both A and B. All four team A members who agreed to participate in this study used the word “group” to define a team. Two align with my own definition and use the word “goal” specifically. Nathan defines teaming as, “A group of people working together sacrificing personal goals for the good of others,” while Chrissy said a team consists of “a group of people working toward a goal” (Interview 2001).
Laura and John also mentioned students in their definition and agreed that teams should work together for the betterment of their students. Laura added the integration of disciplines as well. Nathan discussed also the willingness to compromise and work together (Interview 2001).

I took the idea of “working together” for granted, originally skipping over it as part of the teams’ definition of teaming. Looking back, however, I understand the importance of the idea of “working together” as opposed to “working apart.” One of the essential components of teaming must include the idea of together as opposed to separate. Chrissy even pointed out that teaming at Swiftwater Intermediate School (RBIS) varied from her original definition of teaming as teachers “trying” to work together. Already the ideal and actual begin to splinter with Chrissy acknowledging that teaming and our school’s definition of teaming may be different. Nathan also agreed with Chrissy that team teaching and teaming in our school do not automatically overlap. He cut short the definition of teaming at RBIS as a “group of four to five teachers” (Interview 2001).

My own definition of the ideal team and teaming in our school would also look different, as the teams at RBIS are a group of teachers with the same students who do complete administrative tasks, but not always working toward a common goal. John acknowledges than teaming varies for each team in the building without much uniformity (Interview 2001). Since teams originated as an attempt to provide students with a school within a school, the idea of teams taking different identities makes sense. Members of Team B compared teaming to athletic teams and the military, both having goals and offering a “united front” (Interview 2004).
Common to the teaming research and my own findings, certain components of teaming are universal to an understanding of how interdisciplinary teams can be functional and more importantly effective. The Definitive Middle School Guide lists characteristics of effective teaming including “meet daily for team meetings, designate a team leader, strive to preserve team autonomy, share decision-making, respecting similarities and differences, discuss students, develop interdisciplinary unites, plan goals and evaluate programs” (Forte and Schurr 104). At their core, teams consist of teachers from various disciplines with common planning time working together for students. How, why, and when they work together and what they work on varies from team to team, some more effective than others.

5.2 Components of Effective Teaming (See Figure 2)

It is impossible to discuss teams in terms of success in comparison with other teams since each team is unique and success can be defined differently for every team. Effectiveness, however, indicates the attainment of a desired effect or accomplishment. It is more useful to discuss teams in terms of their effectiveness in producing outcomes particular to their unique situations than it is to attempt to define a successful team. An effective team is one who meets desired goals, whether these goals are driven by an individual, team or administration.

The literature defines components which effective teams should include such as dividing duties, “Effective teams divide duties so that more cooperation and collaboration can be achieved to meet students’ needs” (Kew 39). Other components, mentioned in Chapter 2, common to interdisciplinary teams, were also common in my own research.
FIGURE 2

CLUSTERS OF EFFECTIVE TEAMING

Cluster 1: Management
- Productive Meetings
- Time to Meet and Plan
- Leadership
- Administrative Support

Cluster 2: Personnel
- Commitment to Teaming
- Personality
- Communication
- Trust

Cluster 3: Objectives
- Focus on Students
- Shared Goals
- Interdisciplinary Curriculum
After a three year study of Team 8 Orange I found three clusters of effective teaming which include team management, personnel and objectives. The four aspects of team management include team leadership, time, and administrative support. The second cluster, team personnel includes the following qualities: commitment to teaming, personality, communication skills and trustworthiness. The third and final cluster, team objectives consists of three aspects: shared goals, interdisciplinary curriculum, and focus on students. Each of these eleven components together contributes to effective interdisciplinary teams in a middle-level context.

My original research focused on an attempt to quantify each of these components, determine their place in the model of effective teaming and rank them against each other, placing importance on some over others. I abandoned my attempt to position individual components as I grew to realize the futility of such and effort, the connectedness of each and importance of viewing them as a part of a whole rather than separate from each other, much like a team itself.
CHAPTER 6
TEAM PERSONNEL

6.1 Introduction

Given the organizational and managerial structure, a team can only function as well as its people allow. The driving force, the people who comprise the team, must not only be capable in their own subject area but able to work together every day. Team A began more as a group of friends and developed into a team of teachers. Aside from meetings and school, many of the team members associated outside of school as well. Nathan and I remain good friends as well as running partners and during a difficult transition in his life, even a temporary roommate to my husband and me. In 2001, when Kim began teaching on Team A, living only a few miles from my house, she began to drive to school with me, and we became friends. Two years earlier, I was shocked to see a fellow schoolmate from high school, John, even though our school is a half-hour commute for both of us. The three of us and later Kim often spent time together outside of school. At times our personal relationship and professional relationship became blurred, and it was often difficult to separate the two.

Laura and later Chrissy brought a different dynamic to the personality of the team. While Laura, John and Kim associated outside of school, Nathan and I were not as close to them on a personal level. Today the team is beginning to develop personal relationships. I’ve invited the team to my house on more than one occasion and Sara and I are increasingly becoming close outside of school. The inter-personal relationships of Team 8 Orange are complex and at times confusing, but also shed light on our professional relationships as team members.
The core of any team is its people. Their attitudes toward each other and teaming tremendously affect the dynamic of the team. The second cluster of effective interdisciplinary teaming, “Personnel,” includes four aspects: personality, commitment to teaming, communication and trust. While interrelated, each component influences separately the effectiveness of a team.

6.2 Personality

January 14, 2002. Team A meets in a classroom on the downstairs level of the school. It is the last period of the day with everyone expecting snow the following morning.

Kim: Molly is not handing in any assignments. I don’t know what to do with her. Any suggestions?
Nathan: Welcome to my world. One assignment a week, given on Monday and due on Friday, how hard can it be?
Cecelia: Are we going around? I have two issues for the team.
Nathan: Sure. Let’s start with Jessica.
John: Kim is making fun of me over here for being indecisive. I’m actually trying to explain myself. Don’t we need to talk about TASC?
Nathan: TASC is a waste of time. OK, everyone needs to stop talking at once. Jessica?
John: Hey Nick.
Nick: How’s it going guys? Who are we on?
Nathan: You brother, go ahead.
Nick: I have one of your students in my office who is being cited for absences. I need you records for two dates.
John: I wish Kim would stop making fun of me.

This meeting is typical of some of the team members including Nathan who, as unofficial team leader, is constantly trying to pull people back on topic. As a teaching veteran, Nathan in not shy about admitting he likes things his way. On the other hand, he is very willing to try new things and give up control when he feels it’s best for the team. “Brother, if you think you can come up with a better plan, by all means, let’s have it” (Fieldnotes 2002). Speaking to John, Nathan uses the term little brother, and John in turn
calls Nathan big brother. Both gentlemen, with different but equally funny senses of humor, make the team and the students laugh almost daily.

Nathan likes to tease people and admits it. He once told a group of French students to leave the library because they were not supporting the war on terror. When they tried to explain they were merely French students he looked at them and said, “You’re speaking French. I heard you. Therefore, you must be French.” It took the French teacher to shoo him out of the library and settle the poor 7th graders down who were beginning to get violent with Nathan. This same teacher, with a 2-11 record for calling snow days, still predicts the weather by sending an e-mail to the entire school knowing he will certainly take abuse for it (Fieldnotes 2003).

John is no less the comedian. When his Bobafet (a life-size cardboard cutout of his favorite Star-Wars figure) was stolen from his room, he went onto the announcements to secure his return. “I will hunt you down and find you. Make no mistake, Bobafet is a bounty hunter, and I’ve learned his skills. You can’t run; you can’t hide. You should be scared.” As the culprit, I wasn’t the least bit scared since I knew John really could not talk to the cardboard cutout and knew nothing of bounty hunting (Fieldnotes 2001).

Kim, in her early thirties with a son at home, was glad to be a new teacher and spent countless hours preparing lessons. She was given an old planning center as her classroom, and even with a pull-out class of nine the quarters were tight. She made the most of her surroundings, turned the back room into a mini-kitchen and people could often be found on planning periods in her room. Kim mothered her students and discussed them often at meetings. One Monday morning she was particularly disappointed when she found out a female student of hers had been dirty dancing at
Friday’s dance. She pulled her aside for a long talk and told the team she would not be engaging “in any more of that” (Fieldnotes 2002).

Laura’s personality varied from day to day. Some days she was kind and helpful while other days she lived up to her nickname “Taz” for the Tasmanian devil. She whirled into meetings, said her piece and then sat back and took in the remainder of the meeting. On February 27, 2003 Laura began yelling at John who moved across the room at a meeting. “I have a concern dammit” she told us at which point John said, “Then say it like a normal person.” In April that same year she interrupted the meeting with, “I have nothing so can’t we dismiss this meeting?” After a few minutes, with the meeting still in progress, Laura left anyway.

This year Team B’s new members-- Sara, Luke and Llamar-- are each unique in their own ways. Llamar, worked at one time as a blaster. Married with no children, Llamar’s political views are completely opposite from my own which makes for interesting debates. As a first-year teacher Llamar is constantly telling himself he needs to be more organized moving from class to class as the Team B inclusion teacher. Llamar’s sense of humor, different than John or Nathan’s, is drier with one-liners constant. He took on the job of team leader one month and said he “felt comfortable with the role.” Llamar likes to joke around with the kids who sometimes don’t understand his sophisticated sense of humor.

Llamar’s desk, with no room of his own, is housed in Luke’s classroom. Luke, back from 6th grade with “I’m never going back” on the attendance envelope outside his door, says he’s very happy with the team. A proud parent of a son in the Air Force, Luke sets high standards for the students and even has them stand and address him as “sir”
when they ask questions in order to make them more aware of their speech. Luke rarely goes home at 3:00 and can be found after school running after-school detention, Student Government or Saturday school. When not running an after-school program, Luke can be found at one of the kids’ games. In the fall the girls’ basketball team made a banner for him they displayed at the pep rally which read, “Thank you Mr. Neibert for all your support! (Fieldnotes 2003).

Sitting next to Luke at many of the games is Sara. A second year teacher, Sara was placed with 8 White after being a member of another 8th grade team for a year. Originally apprehensive about switching teams, she has “found a home” as she once put it. Looking forward to her wedding this summer, Sara, in her early twenties, shares enthusiasm and love with the students and teachers on Team B.

The final member of Team 8 Orange who was on the team before I joined it six years ago, respectfully asked not to be included in this study. While it is unavoidable to use her name which is a pseudonym like the others, I will refrain from describing in detail situations which include this particular team member.

Teachers on Team 8 Orange agree personality plays an important role in teaming. Nathan considers it “extremely important” which are the same words Laura used to describe the role of personality on teams. She even believes people should be moved around if team members are not compatible since personality is a “major factor in the success of teams” (Interview 2002). The desire to be on a team and willingness to work at teaming plays an equally important role as fitting together personalities that work well together.
6.3 Commitment to Teaming

When RBIS began teaming they attempted to bring the rationale and encourage a willingness to team along with the new initiative. Nathan remembers limited inservicing; he says most of the training and explanations for teaming by the administration was brief, making the lived experience a primary resource for teams. With a desire to team and commitment to improvement, teams will find it difficult to become as effective as possible.

Nearly everyone on Team 8 Orange wants to team. They all see its advantages. Nathan believes teams can accomplish more than one person working alone by distributing the workload, even if the distribution is not always even. Laura stresses the support teachers on a team give each other and also sees better relationships between students and their teachers on teams. John also mentioned support as well as the ability to take good field trips and, if consistent, enforce rules with better discipline as a team. Chrissy agrees support both for teachers and students is a major advantage for teams along with the ability to address chronic problems with students (Interview 2002).

While all team members, including those on Team A who collectively see advantages to teaming and want to be a part of a team, enjoy team membership, all do not always consider themselves team players. All members of Team A understand their role and believe they fill that role to the best of their ability. Nathan understands what it takes to be a team players and sites athletics as a comparison. He understand sacrifices which need to be made and feels comfortable with his role as a team player since he’s been on teams his whole life. John, Laura and Chrissy see themselves as team players some of the time. Laura says she sometimes wants to “shut the door” and not necessarily interact
with others. John said he is “sometimes a team player and am willing to compromise but
sometimes not.” Chrissy sees her role as the inclusion teacher one which limits her
ability to be a part of the team since sometimes her values conflict with others making her
seem outside the team.

When I first approached Team A about the possibility of studying our team for
research, five of six members agreed to be included in the study. I outlined my needs and
all agreed to sign the waiver, be available for occasional interviews, allow me to take
notes and tape team meetings as well as collect anything I saw as relating to the team. I
made it clear to them my desire to focus on interdisciplinary teaming stemmed from a
desire to understand and improve on it. They agreed this offered a unique opportunity to
help the team become more effective.

Throughout the following two and a half years, I took notes at nearly every team
meeting and attempted to interview team members at various times. Though Nathan was
always available for an interview, I struggled with the other members. While John was a
member of the team he missed or re-scheduled interviews on a regular basis. It was also
difficult to interview Laura or Chrissy since I told them at various times, such as on
March 27, 2002, to see me whenever they had a free moment in the next two weeks. On
April 22nd, I voiced my concern about the interviews which still had not occurred. On
April 23rd, when I walked into John’s room on our planning period, he and Chrissy and
Laura were sitting at student desks discussing the summer. I again asked for all three to
let me know when we could meet. I was only able to interview each of the three one last
time before the end of the school year.
Team B’s attitude toward my research differs from that of Team A. In four months, with five of six members agreeing to be a part of my research, three team meetings have been devoted entirely to discuss teaming. In addition, all five members stayed after school for flexible in-service time for two hours to further discuss the research focused on making our team more effective. At that meeting the team set more structured goals and discussed both the philosophy of teaming and the components which comprise effective teams.

A few weeks later Luke brought a video into my class he thought I’d like to see. The scene, from *Dances with Wolves*, was of a meeting. “Look at this. Either they knew how a meeting should look or the makers of the film know how to run a meeting. Either way, check it out.” The scene showed a meeting of a Sioux tribe. Luke noted that even though one man disagreed with the others, he listened to the opposition, nodded his head, and began speaking by acknowledging his claim. Only then, Luke pointed out, did he voice his opposition. He was impressed that no one spoke except the speaker, and that members were respectful of each other. He agreed to bring the tape to a team meeting for each of us to view and discuss.

As mentioned earlier, the meeting lies at the heart of any interdisciplinary team. Aside from lunch, the meetings serve on busy days as the only time team members communicate with each other. Different members hold different attitudes toward these meetings. Most members of Team A aside from Nathan, Jessica and myself came late to multiple meetings throughout the year. Tracking the times people arrived to meetings, I found more late arrivals than on time ones. The members on Team B, possibly because
of the unique situation of being forced from our rooms, arrive at the meeting only minutes after the bell rings, earlier even than the start time of previous years’ meetings.

While at the meeting, members of Team A sometimes engaged in various activities other than talking to team members. In January at a meeting, Laura graded papers as John graded tests. Over the next few months, John and Laura each brought work to the meeting such as on May 19th when Nathan chided John for grading papers at the meeting (Fieldnotes 2003).

I asked the team in an interview about their level of commitment to teaming. John mentioned that while he liked the idea of a team, he did see it at times as a diversion from things like lesson planning and grading. Similarly Laura said, “Teaming is OK. Sometimes I feel like being a part of it and other times I could take or leave it. As for making it better, I think we’re fine the way we are.” None of the members on Team A interviewed, with the exception of Nathan, felt the team needed to be improved much. If improvement was necessary, it took a backseat to specific disciplines. Nathan disagreed, “If everyone was serious about the team, we could do lots to make it better. People care more about their own thing and don’t really see the need to do any more than we already do for the team” (Fieldnotes 2002-2003).

Commitment to interdisciplinary team includes a desire to want to team, a need to improve on teaming and willingness to devote resources to the team. Team A members have displayed each of these at various times. In addition to their participation in this study, Team B recently agreed to take a sign-language course together in order to better meet the needs of deaf students. Luke expressed interest in a teaming seminar this summer because, as he put it, “That would be really cool, if the team could do something
like that, learn together about what makes good teams.” All members agreed it would be something they would be interested in attending. Team A members also decided to meet over the summer “even if we don’t get flex time” as Llamar said.

If teachers want to team then a major hurdle has been overcome. Many like myself are told they will be a part of a team after they’ve been hired. Without a choice, some see teaming as a necessary evil while others embrace the concept. An administrator can set guidelines or even rules for teamed teachers to follow, but without a commitment to the concept, teams can not reach their full potential.

6.4 Communication

“A team that communicates is a successful one,” said Laura. She added, “You can tell if teachers are working together or not by whether they are communicating.” Chrissy defined a successful team as one that “communicates, with each member listening to the others.” John believes “conversation is the most important factor in team success. Listening to each other and talking to team members is so important.” The issue of communication was raised in interviews more than any single other topic (Fieldnotes 2002).

In October of 2001, Nathan expressed his concern at the lack of communication taking place, “Nick said he would get the list of buses to us. If everyone would stop talking at once you’d have heard him and we wouldn’t be talking about a dead issue.” Later in that same team meeting, I interjected by asking the team to stop discussing “dead issues.”

Communication takes many forms. Verbal communication can be heard at team meetings when members attempt to discuss topics. On January of that same school year
Nathan commented on Team A’s lack of communication skills, “We made a decision and it’s time to move on. Communicate people.” After the meeting he vented his frustrations jokingly adding that the team could use training on how to communicate with each other.

The following week, John took my notebook filled with fieldnotes on the meeting and wrote in the margin that he wished people would move on to new issues because the meetings were going absolutely nowhere. He voiced a concern that each one of the team members raised at one point. With the circle method of going from one person to the next rarely working, the issue of how to conduct a meeting so that everyone could be heard continued late into the Spring of the 2001-2002 school year with no system ever put into place that everyone could agree on.

At times so many people talked at meetings that I was forced to make a conscious decision to choose one conversation over another because I could not follow all of them at once. In March 2002 I asked if we could re-institute the circle or some other measure because I was having a hard time transcribing tapes with multiple conversations taking place at once. The extent to which the communication was breaking down came to a head at when a discussion took place to either cancel all but one meeting a week or attempt to “gain control over the meetings” as Nathan put it. In April when two members carried on a side conversation immediately after another team member raised a new issue, an outside observer stood up and left, later telling me that they would be unable “to endure that chaos.” At administrative meetings with Nick present, side conversations rarely occurred. On January 16th the team meeting focused on an upcoming field trip and denials. When Nick left thirty-five minutes into the meeting, everyone began to talk, voices were raised and the tone of the meeting changed (Fieldnotes 2003).
The following year, possibly due to the implementation of Nathan as unofficial team leader, there was more of a commitment to meeting procedure. Though side conversations continued, I was able to take notes without the sense of frustration I had the previous year. I began in 2003 to add a “sounds like” component to the fieldnotes, and even with the leader and re-installment of the circle, the January 7, 2003 meeting sounded like more than one conversation at once. Of the thirty remaining meetings that year, all but four sounded like multiple conversations.

Non-verbal communication can be as important as the spoken word. In 2001-2002 the team met in Kim’s room most days. The seating was scattered with no pattern except than people sat mainly in the same seat every day. (See Figure 3) Most often John and Kim sat at a computer; face to face communication occurred when they left the computers to join the meeting. Both left their computer seats to sit closer to the other team members when they were discussing an issue.

The following year, the seating looked more like a circle, with John and Chrissy on the fringe of the circle. Some days Chrissy sat on the desk, while Laura did not have a set seat. Most often she sat near John or Chrissy, but not in the same seat at each meeting, switching between seats and also sitting on desks.

At meetings Nathan sat at a desk with his feet stretched out in front of him, ankles crossed. Both Jessica and I sat in the desk leaning slightly forward with some type of notebook on the desk. John varied his seating depending on what he did at the meeting such as type at the computer or more often sit in a desk; he often shifted in his seat without staying in one position for very long. Kim typed at times on the computer, and while at a desk, crossed her arms or sometime hands, leaning forward when she talked.
Figure 3

TEAM SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

Team Meeting Seating Arrangement 2001-2002

Team Meeting Seating Arrangement 2002-2003

*Laura-No set pattern
Chrissy sat often with her arms crossed and other times on top of the desk with her hands on her knees. The “meetings looked like” section of my notes enabled me to outline a rough sketch of the team meeting seating arrangements in 2001-2003.

This school year, the planning center Team B utilizes has a large table which the team sits around. The only exception is Llamar and Jessica who sit at student desks which are pulled up to the table which seats four. The meeting this year sounds like one person talking at a time. One days when more than one person speaks, Nathan usually comes right to the point saying, as he did at a recent meeting, “OK, folks, one at a time.” He maintains the straightforward approach is his answer to “meeting chaos” and that issues such as “side conversations” have to be “stopped in their tracks” (Interview 2004).

People express ideas differently. At times I do not heed the advice I give to students when discussing effective communication. Rather than listening, I prepare my speech and therefore miss what others are saying. In my desire to inject my opinion on subjects, I will inadvertently cut others off and only realize later my mistake. Many meetings in 2003 were cut short because people were unwilling to listen to others.

The administration listed “continue to communicate” this year as one of its goals. Communication includes verbal and non-verbal and occurs not only in meetings but in hallways, on the phone and through email. Team B, unlike Team A, communicates often and not only at team meetings. During other common planning times, the majority of team members get together in one team classroom to talk about school and non-school related topics. Five of six team members eat lunch together every day while one works through lunch or occasionally joins the team. Team B stayed after school on more than once occasion to attend student events such as field hockey games, and all team members
came to my house before the year began and once again in the fall. Communication occurs nearly every day through email. Just this week Sara sent me “Research Ex” grades by e-mail with a note attached, “Hope you have a better day. Here are the grades, enjoy.” Nathan sent an email to the team communicating his pleasure with the work we’ve done this year. John responded with an email of his own, “I love you guys.”

Sara pointed out earlier in the year that to her the most important element of teaming was trust. She said recently, “Because I feel I can trust you guys I think it makes voicing our concerns so much easier.” Nathan commented on how well he thought Team B communicates by listening to each other and agreed with Sara, “It’s amazing how much communication and trust go hand in hand. For instance, I trust that Sara will not hit me when I tell her I ate all of her wheat thins.” Everyone laughed. (Fieldnotes 2004).

6.5 Trust

Sara began her teaching career on another team at RBIS. In her second year, having moved to Team 8 Orange, she told the team that trust was the most important factor for her as a member of an interdisciplinary team. Mistrust, in her opinion, can destroy a team. She referred to individual team members talking about other members behind their back. “That’s cowardly,” said Luke. All Team B members agreed the most expedient and trustworthy method to avoiding conflict was to discuss problems directly with the source.

When I began team research, the issue of trust was not a component or even an aspect of teaming I focused on while reading, observing or writing. It emerged not as an obvious component to effective teaming mentioned in every piece of literature, but as one
which linked other components such as personality and communication. Trust is difficult to observe or take fieldnotes on, but is a factor nonetheless.

Because of relationships outside school, Team A began to splinter in 2002-2003. Nathan and I, always good friends, became distant from Kim and John more and more as the year progressed. Laura, who was new to the team, gravitated toward Kim, and by the end of the year factions existed. At a meeting in the Spring of 2003, when the team tried to decide if we should take an end of the year fieldtrip or not, we voted for the first time ever since an agreement could not be reached. Outvoted, Nathan and I, who did not agree with the trip the others wanted to take, stayed behind with those denied. This separated the team more than ever into two camps. Jessica remained neutral, not willing to vote but attending the trip and staying out of more conversations which tended to split into the two sides.

When Chrissy joined the team in the fall of 2003, she became friends with John and all four team members other than Nathan and I ate lunch upstairs in a planning center while we joined the remaining faculty in the lunchroom. This arrangement lended itself toward mistrust of what the others discussed at lunch or when they met independent of the remaining team. People were less willing to be open when the team came together as a whole. “I feel like we’re two teams. I don’t know what they’re saying or doing upstairs at lunch, and I’m sure they feel the same about us,” said Nathan in the spring of 2003. In an interview later that month, I asked him to elaborate on the issue of trust: “You can’t be stabbing each other in the back or undermining what other team members do. I can’t afford to trust anybody on something that can be used against me. I guess I trust the team slightly more than some other colleagues.” Laura put it this way, “If we’re
talking about, say, ratting each other out in front of Nick, I don’t think anyone would do
that. Beyond that, who knows?”

Trust builds with time; time is the only other team management component of
effective teaming not mentioned explicitly. The amount of time the teachers spend
together effects their relationship and level of trust. The members on Team 8 Orange
changed throughout the course of six years enough that I’ve separate them into two
distinct groups, A and B (See Appendix A).

With people in place, a team must move forward and begin to complete tasks.
Management of teams lies both with themselves and administration. There are four
components of effective teaming in relation to its management which include regular and
effective meetings, time to plan, the administrative support a team receives and
appointment of a team leader. These four components, combined with those of team
personnel-commitment to teaming, personality, communication and trust—represent two
of three clusters to interdisciplinary teaming which combined contribute to effective
teams.
CHAPTER 7
TEAM MANAGEMENT

7.1 Introduction

Team management includes those aspects of teaming which lend to its organizational structure. The management cluster of teaming includes four aspects: team leader, meetings, time and administrative support. Each of these aspects contributes to effective teams as precisely functioning. From fieldnotes, interviews and artifacts I will describe each component of the management aspect as they relate to Team 8 Orange, both A and B.

7.2 Team Leader

Some schools designate team leaders while others leave the decision to the team. Some formalize the leader by giving him or her extra planning time and sometimes even extra pay. Yet others minimize the responsibility of a team leader. At RBIS Nick made a conscious decision not to address the matter of team leadership. He wants each member to feel they are an equal part of the team and is hesitant to place extra responsibilities any one person (Interview 2004).

The issue of leadership first arose on Team A in 2002 when I suggested the possibility of a team leader to oversee meetings. Previously, no official leader had been appointed, and since Nathan had the most experience as a teacher, he tended to speak out more often when circumstances necessitated leadership. In the summer before the 2002-2003 school year the subject arose once more and all agreed that Nathan should take the role of leader, and he accepted. As the leader he started and ended the meetings and attempted to keep the team on task at meetings. I presented the idea of jobs for individual
team members at this time and each person choose a field trip and other duty to perform as well so the leader was not overburdened (See Appendix G).

Some days Nathan’s job as team leader led to frustration on his part as on May 19\textsuperscript{th} when he told people they too often showed up at meetings late. Nathan saw his primary purpose as leader to “move the meetings along” and on more than one occasion wanted to give the job away because “we aren’t getting things done” (Fieldnotes 2003). At meetings, Nathan began by pointing to the person sitting to his right or left and proceed “around the horn” by raising issues or topics of concern. At times he waited for all members to arrive and other times, as on March 25\textsuperscript{th}, he began the meeting, in this case with three members, by saying, “OK, let’s get started. The meeting begins at 12:15 whether or not we’re all here.” Often, as in this case, some of the issues to be addressed necessitated decisions by all team members and those present would discuss non-school related topics until all members arrived. At this particular meeting the subject was Nathan’s track meet. After twelve minutes, Nathan adjourned the meeting. Five minutes later, when two of the three remaining members arrived, Nathan re-adjourned the meeting so that a decision on TASC rooms could be made.

Earlier that year in an interview Nathan expressed his frustration with the job of team leader. “I think a leader is necessary, but I’m frustrated with the role. The meetings are hard to control, and I get especially aggravated when people coming late ask what they missed. The meetings take much longer than they should.” I was never able to ask John any questions about leadership since our last interview was cancelled. Laura did mention that she saw team leadership as essential and in her mind the leader should be the authority figure in the group. She thought Nathan was doing “one hell of a job” since
“criticism rolls of his back.” Chrissy was hesitant to call the role a “team leader.” She believed that someone should take the initiative to get things done because if too many people talk at the same time no one gets heard. However, she thought the position should be called “team facilitator” rather than “team leader” (Interview 2002).

This summer, in August 2003, Team B met and decided to rotate leadership monthly. (See Appendix G) With three of six members new, this provides and opportunity for each team member to get to know the others’ styles of leadership and personalities without placing more importance than others on individual members. The leader keeps the binder which includes an agenda of the meeting, team contract information, and student discipline reports and TASC lists (See Appendix E). He or she begins by pointing out any old business left undecided and continues the meeting in a circle with each members’ concerns. After approximately ½ hour, the meeting ends and informal discussion take place.

The leaders’ primary job is to keep the team focused at meetings and ensure meeting productivity. Since members have individual jobs, the leaders’ primary concern focuses on meetings. Team meetings which include all team members are the heart of an interdisciplinary team since this is the time to discuss issues, plan, and organize.

7.3 Meetings

For nearly three years I wrote fieldnotes at team meetings. Early in the research, the building principal did not mandate a set amount of meeting days, though each week there was an “administrative meeting.” Included at this meeting, in addition to the regular team members, were the team administrator and team guidance counselor. Throughout the course of this study our team administrator has also been the building
principal. In the 2001-2002 school year the team make-up included myself, Nathan, Jessica, John, Laura and Kim. At this time RBIS was housed in a building under construction which is our current Swiftwater Elementary Center. Team 8 Orange was housed downstairs. With the bulk of the teams upstairs, we were fairly isolated with the gym and related arts teachers on the same floor but on the opposite side of the building. RBIS consisted of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade with approximately 1,200 students. Team 8 Orange consisted of approximately 138 students. With students leaving and new students joining the team, the exact number varies throughout the year.

On October 3, 2001 our first daily team meeting took place in my room. We began by discussing meeting procedures such as using an agenda. We decided at this time on the “circle” method where each person would speak continuing in a circle. The field trips dominated the October discussion topics followed by students and various other issues such as our web page, paperwork, creating student databases, and parent conferences (Fieldnotes 2001).

In the next two months the team continued to discuss the format of meetings. Since many meetings started late or began without all members present, the meeting time continued to arise as an issue. On November 5, 2003 a ten minute discussion ensued on re-thinking meetings, times and the possibility of a new “system” of discussion. The team decided to wait for John who was not present to talk in a future meeting about a new system. In December the issue was raised again and the team agreed on meeting days (see Appendix E). At some administrative meetings nine members were present. In addition to the regular six regular team members were the guidance counselor, administrator, and gifted coordinator. Each of these meetings resulted in “side-
conversations” between members with as many as three discussions occurring at one time. On four separate dates throughout this time period, Kim talked to John or Nick about her special education students as another discussion proceeded with the remaining members (Fieldnotes 2001).

One meeting on December 3rd revolved around lost money as Laura attempted to determine where a portion of the field trip money could be located. Another meeting on December 4th revolved around an incident at lunch. This began as an informal talk as the team waited for John to arrive, but eventually became the meeting focus for the day. In the course of four months, beginning in September until the holiday break in December, Team A met twenty-two times for an average of a little over once per week (Fieldnotes 2001).

In an interview that fall the team expressed their feelings about the productivity of team meetings. Nathan, the informal team leader, described meetings as a “constant struggle to keep everyone focused and on task.” He did not believe the team would meet if they were not forced to by the administration at least once a week. He described the meetings as “overall, ineffective.” Laura agreed with Nathan but noted that meeting productivity depended on “what we’re meeting about.” She added that the meetings “needed a focus.” John expressed happiness with the fact that Team A decided to meet less. He admitted that meetings with our administrator were “more productive” than meetings without him. Chrissy asked about team meetings, “Have we had one?” She agreed with John that meetings are better since “we’re meeting less” and said, “They were a waste of time but better now and more focused since we’re meeting less often” (Fieldnotes 2001).
Both Nathan and Laura also expressed concern that meetings with our administrator functioned more smoothly. Nathan commented, “In meetings with him, people aren’t out of control. They act the way they’re supposed to act and aren’t rude or disruptive the way they normally tend to be.” Laura agreed, “Sometimes they [meetings] tend to be more professional when he is there” (Interview 2002). The other members did not comment on the subject as they were unavailable for interviews.

Most meetings the remainder of the 2001-2002 school year began late. I noted meeting beginning and ending times, and actual start times averaged approximately nine minutes later than the agreed upon start time. Many meetings began without members present such as on February 25th at which myself, Jessica and Nathan were the only ones in attendance at 1:50 pm (meeting start time.) At 2:10 pm Laura arrived followed by John at 2:15 pm and Kim at 2:17 pm. With less than fifteen minutes before the bell, the team discussed meeting times before it was unofficially adjourned when members began to leave one by one (Fieldnotes 2002).

Discussion topics ranged from student failures to TASC and student of the month. During TASC some students attend band or chorus while the majority stay with the team teachers. Most use this period as a study hall, and the team frequently discusses the arrangement and procedures for this period. We decided to rotate TASC with another period called “Research Exploration” better known as “Research.” While most students attend related arts classes, approximately twenty-five students stay with the team who teach anything ranging from boating courses to scriptwriting. Whenever a teacher taught “Research” he or she would be off for TASC. We also agreed to make some TASC
rooms a reward room for students doing well academically. The work room would house students needing extra academic attention (See Appendix C).

Field trips continued for the remainder of the year to dominate discussion nearly two to one over other discussion topics. In a typical meeting, after the bulk of the team arrived, we would attempt to “go around the circle” with issues to be addressed by each team member. However, as on January 14th, many times people would talk “out of order” resulting in side conversations and non-decisions (Fieldnotes 2001). On January 2nd I observed the meeting began at 1:56 (six minutes late) “without a binder or circle” (Fieldnotes 2001). The binder was a new strategy Team A employed at the beginning of the year in order to attempt to use an agenda for meetings. The binder, rarely used, was stored in Kim’s room which was sometimes locked as it contained confidential student IEP’s.

Aside from field trips and TASC, students were always a topic of concern. On January 14th Kim discussed how a student of hers was doing in class. On February 11th Jessica asked if a student should begin to attend homework club, and on March 12th the team tried to determine if a student should be considered for alternative education. While Team A focused on field trips more than any other topic at team meetings, students were the second most discussed topic of conversation. Kim’s special education students were discussed more than all other remaining students on the team.

In the 2002-2003 school year, Chrissy replaced Kim as the special education teacher on Team A. I took notes at forty-seven team meetings throughout the year. At ten meetings all team members were present and on time. We continued with an attempt at meeting order with the circle of discussion. Fields trips persisted to dominate
discussion and were a topic at over half of all meeting which I observed. Other team meeting topics included: students, students with IEP’s, gifted students, student schedules, budget, incentives, agenda planners, homework club, moving to another building, PSSA preparation and scores, “Research,” grades, behavior, parents, “TOY,” student of the month, honor roll, “Night of Excellence,” bullying, TASC, homebound, summer school, Secretaries Day, and various Language Arts projects. TASC was re-arranged with the addition of SSR and the re-naming of the work room to SAFE room. (see Appendix F)

On eleven occasions more side conversations occurred which were addressed by some member of the team. On January 16th I observed, “Everything ran smoothly. When he [administrator] left everyone began talking at once. Voices were raised and Nathan addressed the issue” (Fieldnotes 2003). Aside from topics of conversation I also observed what team members were doing at meetings. Nearly all of the forty-seven meetings were interrupted either by either teachers stopping in or phone calls. Team members coming late to meetings also interrupted the flow of conversation as well as members grading papers, filling out basketball pools or correcting tests (Fieldnotes 2002-2003).

A typical team meeting might look like the one on May 19, 2002. People sat scattered in no particular order with some in a semi-circle and others off to the side. The room smelled like a candle I had burning at the time. The mood was slightly tense since not everyone was present and some were complaining for Nathan to start the meeting officially. John was not in attendance yet, and Nathan began by telling people they were late. He discussed the luau party we were planning and his concern about not using the
pool because of the lack of a lifeguard. He pointed out that our field trip was cut and Jessica asked about the possibility of charting private busses. Chrissy mentioned she may not be able to go to Dorney Park (our reward for winning Team of the Year) and Nathan teased her about it. He then said, “Go ahead Cecelia” and I asked when the team wanted to hand out honor roll certificates. We set a date for an honor roll breakfast the following week and some of us took jobs for that event. Nathan began talking about how he lost some science textbooks while John corrected tests. John looked up at one point while we discussed the luau and told us about a student he caught copying a test. Jessica responded by telling us she was worried about having two substitutes the following day for TASC. Nathan then adjourned the meeting.

During two months of the year field trips were a constant source of discussion unlike the following year, 2003-2004, when the field trip policy changed. Limited to two trips a year, the meeting discussion topics have shifted away from field trips. In September and October the meetings focused on procedure. After meeting in the summer, Team B decided to meet everyday. With teachers claiming each of our rooms during our planning period, we were given a planning center where we could meet. Since each teacher was forced from their room, all six members get to the planning center within five minutes of the bell. The topics of discussion increased with students, PSSA’s, IEP’s, “Research”, alternative education, TASC, personal matters, and conferences all discussed in a one-week period.

Each Tuesday Team B has an administrative meeting which includes the regular six members in addition to the team administrator and guidance counselor. Other changes include the seating arrangement. The team sits in a circle with some members at
a table and other in student desks around the fringe of the table. We also decided to rotate team leader by month and set up a schedule in the first month for the year (See Appendix G). Many earlier discussions revolved around TASC. Different arrangements were used in the past, and Team B decided to divide students in four rooms as we did previously. However, Luke suggested we should rotate the students daily which we have been doing for seven months. In November, the idea was raised to use the auditorium for one TASC group and make it similar to the old work room. Students failing a class or on a contract would sit spread apart in the auditorium with two teachers on duty. The other TASC rooms would be given more freedom (See Appendix C).

A typical Team B meeting looks like the one held on November 26, 2003. The team leader, Luke, has the binder which includes the agenda, student contracts and other student lists. He begins by bringing up “old business” that needs to be addressed which included the honor roll breakfast and pre-holiday half day schedule. He asked Sara to speak first, and she wondered about grades for “Research.” Next in the circle I told the team I would be having an oral history fair for my language arts projects. Nathan discussed a student, and Llamar ended by asking the team how we dealt with Christmas presents. Each person wrote their name on a slip of paper, and we held a secret Santa drawing. Llamar ate his paper after I warned the team not to share their names with anyone.

My meeting notes ended on December 16th when Luke told Team B a funny story about a teacher and former student. While team meetings vary from day to day and year to year, some of the discussion topics such as students, field trips and parent conferences remain the same. The identity of Team 8 Orange, both A and B, can be traced in a large
part to meetings since this is the time when the entire team interacts with each other. During classes the team looks more like a high school where each teacher closes their door and teaches their class. The textbook team interacts constantly, blocking time and teaching classes together. The team I’ve worked on for the last six years comes together during meetings, lunch and other off periods but teaches for the most part separately.

While it is easy to describe what occurs at team meetings, it is more difficult to put on paper another important component of effective teaming which is time.

7.4 Time to Meet and Plan

In order to be effective, teams need time to meet, time to plan and time together. Teams at RBIS are fortunate to have a forty-two minute period known as “common planning time” for the team. Those who have been in the district longer than my six years are not always grateful for that time since they claim to have received more planning periods in the past. They say in previous years the team had one period of team planning time and one period of personal planning time. This second block was replaced with a class called “Research Exploration” which one teammate is required to teach, therefore giving the entire team only period to plan. While each team teacher has a second period either during research or TASC, all team members come together only one period throughout the day.

Within this period administration schedules one meeting per week. Parent conferences are also held during this forty-two minute block. One of the administrative goals is for teams to meet every day for a minimum of thirty minutes, but there is no plan currently in place to assure this occurs. In 2001-2002, Team A met an average of approximately once per week. Earlier in the year the teams meet more often but decided
to cut down on meeting times. Some members simply wanted to meet less and others did
not believe more meetings necessarily accomplished more tasks. Some weeks, like the
first one in February 2002, the team did not meet at all.

In 2002-2003 Team A met on an average of two times per week. With one
administrative meeting, this left, on average, one team meeting per week. Another day
was set aside as a “curriculum day,” but only four times that year did more than two team
members attend a curriculum meeting. Most meetings one or multiple team members
arrived late and often the meetings would begin with the late arrivals resulting is less than
the forty-two minute allotted period. The meetings began at 12:15 pm with the average
start time after 12:30 pm. Some days, such as on December 4th, team members, in this
case Laura, came to the meeting shortly before the bell for the next class at 12:55. John
and Laura followed by Chrissy came late to more meetings than they were on time.
Nathan, Cecelia or Jessica were rarely late to a meeting. This is consistent with the 2001-
2002 meetings when Nathan, Cecelia and Jessica arrived at meetings less than five times
collectively after the start time.

In the current year, 2003-2004, Team B meets five days per week. Tuesday the
administrative meeting is held. Early in the year most meetings lasted the full period
whereas the meet times have been reduced in the last three-four month by approximately
ten to fifteen minutes. All Team B members arrive on time to meetings.

Late arrivals to meeting projects to other team members a lack of commitment to
the meeting and therefore the team. Arriving on time is essential to getting all necessary
topics covered since most decisions necessitate the entire team present. Team B begin
the meetings promptly while Team A many times cancelled meetings or essentially held
two meetings, one with part of the team present and a second when all team members arrived.

In addition to meeting time, time together as a team contributes to interdisciplinary team effectiveness. Two Team 8 Orange members, Nathan and Jessica, have been together for 14 years. Three members, including Nathan, Jessica and myself have been together for six years. John was with Team A for five years and the remaining members have been with the team for two years or less.

The amount of time Team 8 Orange meets by some degree is dictated by the school administration. Along the same lines, while teachers are free to leave the team and transfer to other grade levels, school or even professions, the team does not control which members are added each year which changes the makeup of the team. These decisions are also controlled by the school administration, primarily the building principal. While time to meet and plan and time together effects teaming, some of these factors are controlled mainly by administration; therefore, administrative support is another important component of effective teaming.

7.5 Administrative Support

In the RBIS student handbook the district philosophy includes the following statement regarding teaming, “We believe that high expectations yield high results and that we can best meet the academic needs of our students by teaming our teachers and by using a variety of teaching strategies and materials” (Intermediate Handbook). Specifically, the school’s philosophy on teaming is mentioned briefly on its welcome page online. It states, “We follow a true middle level philosophy with teaming being the
major component. Students are placed on teams of 5 teachers for their core curricular subjects" (Swiftwater Intermediate School Homepage).

The Pocono Mountain School District began teaming in the 1993-1994 school year. Teachers present at that time remember one in-service before being put on teams, but can not recall any other training since that one day early in the process. Teachers worked out their definitions of teaming “on the job” as they began to work together. Nathan remembers the first year Pocono Mountain started teaming as an beneficial arrangement and great idea. He said it was nice to have a core of people to work and plan activities with as well as to help monitor students’ progress.

On the first in-service day of 2003-2004, the RBIS administration outlined four school goals including teaming. The following areas of teaming were outlined on the list of 2003-2004 goals:

- Continue to Communicate
- Knowledge of Other Academic Areas
- Integration of Curriculum, Thematic Units
- Goal: Team must meet everyday at least 30 minutes
- Set-Up Team Meeting Schedules, Ex. Monday/Inclusion, Tuesday/PSSA, Wednesday/Team, Admin.
- Keep a Team Log to Organize Team Meetings (Artifacts 2004).

Before the 2003-2004 school year, teams were encouraged rather than required to meet more than once per week at the administrative meeting. This is also the first time our school outlined a specific policy for teams concerning meeting schedules or curriculum integration.
The building principal, Nick, has been our team administrator since the beginning of this study in 2001. Once a week he attends the meeting along with the guidance counselor. He begins by asking the team for our concerns and ends by discussing his own. On October 18, 2001 the team addressed field trips denials, making long distance calls to parents, and late buses in the morning. Nick brought up the names of two students in relation to discipline problems and the meeting was adjourned. We discussed each of the issues at least two times throughout the meeting and only student issues were repeated. On March 7, 2004 at another administrative meeting the principal also addressed student behavior, and our concerns for him revolved around the problem of TASC. We ended the meeting with a discussion I prompted concerning middle school philosophy. Our administrator assured me even though the building structure may shift he would continue to remain committed to the middle-level philosophy which includes interdisciplinary teaming.

Like some of the team members, our administrator also tells stories when the meeting is officially over as he did on March 12, 2001. A story about a student who plagiarized had the team laughing for nearly ten minutes. The following year, on January 10, 2002, after another funny story which left the team smiling, I talked informally about teaming; Nick commented that if a team teacher can call other teachers on their team at the end of a period to ask for ten extra minutes with everyone completely comfortable with that, it is an effective team. He stated, “At the core of effective teaming is a teachers’ desire to want to team. With that, you need principals with the power to move around personnel appropriately and he or she can’t always do that” (Fieldnotes 2002). During an interview each team member independently addressed concerns about
the same issue Nick raised. Nathan said effective teams need people who work together but that power is out of the hands of the administration which is a problem. John and Chrissy agreed that although difficult, changing team members would be a good thing at times.

Meetings with and without Nick look different. On January 16th we meet for 26 minutes going around the circle with concerns and staying on task. When Nick left, all team members began talking at once, voices were raised and no decisions were made in the remainder of the period (Fieldnotes 2002). In March of the same year, in the two meetings preceding the administrative meeting, the team did not use the circle method, people voiced concern over the lack of decisions being made and one member even began screaming at one point and stormed out of the meeting. The next day, at a meeting with Nick, each person went around the circle and discussed PSSA (a topic rarely mentioned in non-administrative meetings) and field trips.

In an interview both Nathan and John commented on the difference between meetings with and without Nick. Nathan said he definitely noticed a difference between the two. He noted that at meetings with Nick in attendance “people aren’t out of control.” He added, “When Nick is present, people act the way they’re supposed to act. They’re not rude or disruptive the way they normally tend to be.” John acknowledged that administrative meetings “seem to be more professional” (Interview 2003). The other team members did not comment on the issue of administrative versus non-administrative meetings.

This year in 2004 the meetings with and without Nick are more similar than in the past. Every meeting includes the use of an agenda and going “around the horn” to ensure
each person has a chance to voice concerns. A typical administrative meeting looks like all members in their usual seats with Nick seated between me and Jessica. They resemble the meeting held on October, 2003 when Nick wrote down grades for a student in each class after we told him his grades were slipping across the board. We then filled out a form for a student being tested the following week for special education. Nick wanted to know how our team graded the research class, and he expressed concern over students who might be “blowing off the class.” Finally he told us that all of Florida in on school improvement since No Child Left Behind and the remaining seven minutes were used to debate the politics of NCLB and PSSA testing.

When I asked Team B about the importance of administrative support to team effectiveness, they stressed support should come in the form of letting teams make decisions. Luke said the administrative role should be limited to “passing out bumper stickers and progress reports” while the others stressed the importance of the administrations’ role in choosing team members for teams (Interview 2003).

Administrative support for teams comes in many forms, from placing teachers on teams to giving them goals to work toward. However, even if administrators are committed to creating and maintaining effective teams, the team members themselves must do the same in order for teams to work. Teachers’ attitude and level of commitment toward teaming factor into the effectiveness of a team.
CHAPTER 8
TEAM OBJECTIVES

8.1 Introduction

The third cluster of effective teaming is team objectives which includes three components: a focus on students, shared goals and interdisciplinary curriculum. A focus on students seems obvious. The rationale for teaming centers on a desire to improve the educational experience for those we teach. However, other priorities can take away from a student focus, such as teachers making decisions that benefit themselves first and students second. Teamed teachers, by constantly sharing ideas and gaining support for each other, may begin to prioritize with students not necessarily at the top of the list.

The second component, shared goals, implies that teemed teachers set goals and strive to achieve them. With individual agendas, not all teachers may have the same goals based on their personal philosophies of teaching. Finally, the last component, interdisciplinary curriculum, presupposes teachers use the organizational structure of a team to their advantage by planning and teaching together.

8.2 Focus on Students

There are many ways to focus on students. Teams focus on students when they address student issues as Team A did in November in 2001:

John: How’s he doing in your classes?
Jessica: Not good, I think he may be borderline.
Cecelia: He struggles for me. I’ll check my records, but he may be failing.
John: Nathan?
Nathan: Not good. What’s his deal?
Cecelia: I don’t know, but we should ask the guidance counselor to see what his story is.
John: I brought it up because he was doing OK for me but has gone downhill.
Within a week, we found out the student’s parents were recently divorced. We brought him into a meeting and discussed what could be done to pick up his grades. Often at meeting student concerns are raised by both the team teachers and guidance counselor.

In February of the same year, for instance, Jessica explained a discipline problem she was having in class with a student:

**Jessica:** How is she for you in class?
**Nathan:** Not great.
**Jessica:** I’ve had to talk to her on more than one occasion. I just wondered if I was the only with this problem.
**Cecelia:** Not at all. I’ve talked to her a few times too. Should we bring her in?
**Nathan:** Let’s do it. Where is she now? We’ll get her before class even starts.

The team talked to the student that day, told her we were aware of the behavior problems in class, and put a plan in place to correct the problem. Nathan also mentioned the consequence of field trip denial if her behavior did not improve in class, especially for Jessica.

In contrast, nearly all of the 2001 discussions of students by Team A revolved around problems. Whether these included discipline or academic, typically one teacher raised a concern and the others added their own input. Grade issues consumed most of the academic discussions. In March, the team spent twenty minutes comparing their number of failures so far for the year with those of another team. A debate ensured over the reliability of grades and the meaning of failing grades.

At two-thirds of the 2001 meetings concerns were raised for the special education students on our team. Kim, the special education teacher on Team A, pulled out these students for most classes who were included in American cultures and science only. At meetings she raised concerns about their progress, grades and behavior. Nathan commented on more than one occasion about the time spent on these students. “I
understand they have special needs. I do. But we spend more time on less than ten students than we do on one hundred and thirty. We almost never talk about anything but problems with the regular ed kids; I wonder if they’re getting the raw end of the deal here.” My own brother attended high school at the time. He had an IEP for dyslexia and struggled constantly in school. For this reason, I found it difficult to address the issue without bias toward special education, but also agreed with Nathan’s assessment of the time inequity spent on regular versus special education students.

Aside from academics and discipline, students were discussed as they pertained to parent conferences and in choosing a student of the month. The student of the month program at RBIS requires each team to choose two students to be honored at a breakfast with one team representative, the parents, and administration present.

The following year, much of the same discussion concerning students revolved around discipline and behavior.

Nick: What are your student concerns?
Nathan: David drew satanic symbols on a journal, or at least what we think are satanic symbols. Who knows? He’s a good kid, but do we have to take this any further?
Laura: What about Sally? She doesn’t do a thing and is failing almost every class. She should go to the assembly.
Nick: Ok. One at a time. Did you mention David to guidance? It sound like someone should talk to him.
Nathan: Yeah, we did. And we haven’t had a problem in the last week. Let it drop at that?
Nick: For now. So what’s up with Sally? Is she failing every class? Wasn’t she in alt ed in sixth grade?

Nearing the end of the second quarter, the team decided to wait for Sally’s report card grades and make a decision. David did not have additional problems and satanic symbols disappeared from his journal.
With the gifted students and coordinator assigned to our team in 2002, an additional member joined the team meetings along with additional student concerns. As the team leader, Nathan prodded the team to assign a day for “special needs students.” Once a week special education and gifted students’ needs were specifically addressed. The gifted coordinator used this time to tell Team A about special events the gifted students were involved in, such as a quiz bowl at a neighboring high school. She updated us on their scheduling needs for 9th grade and at times planned on days to come into our classrooms to teach. A former English teacher, she was pleased to “get back into the classroom,” and I welcomed her insight and special lessons.

Chrissy most often said “nothing” when Nathan asked what she had for the team. Only eight times throughout the year did she raise a concern about scheduling, grades or most often accommodations for her students. Once, in February, the day after the special needs meeting Chrissy began to tell the team about two boys being tested. Nathan interrupted, “We set aside a special meeting just for those kinds of things. Sorry, you’ll have to wait until next week to finish,” he said jokingly. Chrissy responded, “I don’t think so Nathan.” She continued with her concerns and the meeting ended with a discussion about a future field trip.

Every once and a while more philosophical and less practical matters made their way into team meetings.

**Guidance Counselor:** I’ve noticed kids who repeat classes tend to fail the following year. I haven’t seen anything that convinces me retention works.

**Nathan:** What do you propose? Let a kid who does nothing move on to the next year? Not with my name written down as their teacher. That tells the high school I think the student possess the skills they need. With a 65 as an average, clearly, they don’t.

**Cecelia:** But what does the 65 means? What does that grade reflect?

**Nathan:** Not this again.
Nick: Intensive summer school seems to help. We’ve found significant gains from one year to the next, and the board agrees that double-up work as well. I think both are good strategies.

Nathan: Then I guess we hope a kid doesn’t fail more than two classes.

Cecelia: (Laughingly) Isn’t that our job Nathan? (I get a nasty look made in fun for that comment.)

Rarely, only on three occasions aside from assemblies or other special events, did Team A address students as a team. In March the students began to get as Laura called it “spring fever” so we brought the team into the auditorium. Nathan spoke at length about decisions, moving on to high school, and not letting hard work fall by the wayside as grades begin to slip with the warmer weather. Chrissy asked John to address recent bullying concerns so John spoke to the students about the unit we did earlier in the year and how bullying effects everyone. Jessica worried the meeting would cut into class time and the meeting ended after thirteen minutes of discussion.

I asked Team A what our team does to meet the needs of students. Nathan responded, “Very little. We discuss troublesome students refer some to guidance and keep better track of what they’re doing behaviorally as we could if not on a team. We do an OK job setting up activities.” Laura struggled with the question, “I’m trying to come up with something. Jessica remediates and some of us re-test and things like that. I’m not sure.” Chrissy said that answer is different for every team but did not think “as a team anything can be done to meet the needs of a student.” John’s response was quite a bit different from the others. “We do quite a bit. We check planners, have their grade on the internet for parents to check, meet with parents, some us of stay after school. I think we do a lot for kids” (Interview 2003).

With Team B meeting every day, more discussion centered around students than in previous years. Only one week from September to December were students discussed
less than four times per week. The topics are similar to those in the past, mostly behavior and academic concerns. The following meeting took place on October 28, 2003 and typifies a Team B meeting concerning students.

Nathan: Matthew is failing language arts and science. (Nick writes down his name.) He hasn’t improved since the last time we brought up his name.

Guidance Counselor: Can you guys fill this form out for a student being tested. Give it to me whenever you have a chance.

Nick: He was at the other campus last year and got into quite a bit of trouble from what I remember. I’m surprised his name hasn’t been brought up before.

Nathan: I’m glad he’s being tested. I have a feeling he’s mis-placed and need more support.

Nick: OK. What about Mary? I have her name down here from the last meeting. Any improvement?

Jessica: Not much. She’s given me more than her share of problems.

Attempting to focus on the positive rather than dwell on the negative, Team B invented a “Discovery Card” which students could apply for, similar to a credit card. They earn rewards by reading, and we hold special events for card holders. Aside from the students of the month and discovery card, most student discussion centered on students who misbehave or are failing multiple classes. At times a student’ achievement is mentioned and the team is prodded by one member to give that student a “pat on the back.” One student who improved dramatically over the course of two quarters was mentioned by multiple teachers’ looking to recognize his success.

Each team teacher focuses on different aspects of teaming depending on his or her personal philosophies and goals. While one may wish to address students’ academics, another is looking for support with student discipline. The individual goals of teachers determine which direction they take concerning students.
8.3 Shared Goals

In language arts students set weekly goals which they evaluate for a grade. Goal setting, I tell them, is something successful people do all of the time. We talk about setting realistic goals, ones that are attainable and clear. They learn to be specific rather than vague in order to make their evaluations easier and meaningful. I share with them my personal and professional goals and encourage them set to set goals outside of school as well. Goals, however, do not factor prominently on Team 8 Orange.

In fact, in 2002 when I asked each teacher separately to define our team goals, none was able to supply an answer. However, when asked about the importance of goals, all described them as “essential for us to be effective as a team” (Chrissy 2002). John saw goals as something we do all of the time. He said, “We have goal in sports and should have team in all areas of our life if we want to succeed.” Nathan agreed, “I think it’s important to have goals. I’m not sure we do as a team, but definitely I have goals for my class, myself and the kids I coach” (Interview 2002).

By shared goals I refer to goals the entire team agrees are important and attainable. I searched my notes from both 2001 and 2002 and could not find a single reference to the word “goal.” Some goals may be implied. For instance, when we agreed to take a fieldtrip to see a play, the team knew the goal would be to arrange a successful trip. To meet that goal people took jobs upon themselves. I wrote, copied and distributed the permission slip. Nathan completed the necessary paperwork while each teacher collected money in their homerooms. Jessica collected and compiled the money, and John signed up students for the buses. The goal, to take a field trip, was shared by each member though never expressed using the word “goal.”
The idea of yearly goals was first raised with Team B this year. In a group interview/discussion, I asked the team if they felt goal setting was important. They agreed that not only was it important goals should be devised for the coming year. We agreed that as a new team we’d strive to get along, get to know each other and clear misconceptions anyone may have about each other as colleagues working in the same school but not on the same team. Nathan told Luke, “I’ll tell you straight out brother. I thought you were into that cutesy stuff, giving out lots of cardinal cards and things like that. At the school drawing I heard your name so often I wondered if you gave kids cards for sneezing.” Luke cleared up than particular misconception, “I had a student on my team that year who was ill. We collected box tops to raise money which is why I gave out so many cards.”

We agreed our other goals must include communication with each other. We referred to an earlier discussion about trust and agreed talking behind someone’s back was counterproductive. Team B also decided to assume roles and give each member responsibilities, therefore taking away burdens on individual members. Around this time I introduced an idea from a conference. The team newsletter would be a weekly publication which we would give to students at a team meeting. The purpose was to meet as a team more often, giving us a stronger sense of identity. The newsletter would serve as a communication tool between the teachers, students and parents. Another goal we agreed on, to my delight, was the implementation of a team newsletter. Finally, the new special education teacher, John, wanted to trade roles with each teacher for a day. We thought this was a great idea and agreed to make it our final goal.
It was no secret on both teams that one of my goals was to introduce interdisciplinary curriculum to the team and integrate subjects in some way. I began my writing with a literature review on interdisciplinary curriculum for a reason. Interdisciplinary teaming and interdisciplinary curriculum are inextricably tied in teaming research, and curriculum integration is listed as a goal for teams in every book and article I’ve read concerning the topic. Curriculum, like goals, however, does not play a prominent role on either team.

8.4 Interdisciplinary Curriculum

Interdisciplinary curriculum refers to a formalized plan of instruction with integrates multiple disciplines. However, as Forte and Schurr debunk myths concerning interdisciplinary instruction, “Integration of the disciplines can be of any duration, can be any combination of subject areas, and can be done by any number of teachers, including a single individual” (308). Last year I planned a unit called “The Living Timeline” which integrated language arts, science and history with students acting out people through history in mini-skits. Though integrated, I alone designed and instructed the unit.

They also emphasize an interdisciplinary unit can be as short as one day or as log as one marking period. In addition, it can be limited, as to math and science, or social studies and language arts, or art and music (Forte and Schurr 308). Interdisciplinary curriculum can take many forms from parallel teaching to full integration. In parallel teaching, for example, a language arts teacher may teach The Diary of Anne Frank while the social studies teacher separately discusses World War II. Fully integrated units are designed by multiple teachers who overlap the material and may even co-teach the lesson together.
Since I believe the benefits of integrating curriculums warrant the time and effort needed to plan such units, I am willing to integrate in any way with my team. While an overall goal remains to fully integrate multiple lessons with all or most disciplines, I would be happy to work with one teacher on one lesson or anywhere in between the two models. Each team member understands interdisciplinary instruction differently. Nathan believes that when teachers sit down and find common topics, relate and reinforce each others disciplines, interdisciplinary instruction is taking place. Laura defines interdisciplinary instruction as more than one discipline planning and teaching together. John also defines it as planning and teaching a unit in addition to teaching things at the same time, such as in parallel teaching (Fieldnotes 2002). Team B sees interdisciplinary curriculum similarly; Luke remembers using themes in the elementary setting and associated thematic teaching with interdisciplinary instruction (Fieldnotes 2004).

We decided, in the fall of 2001, to set aside a day for curriculum integration. If left to the team, the idea of integrating our curriculums would undoubtedly not be a team goal. Before I joined the team, any integration which occurred did so by accident and the junior high model of teaching for forty-two minutes in individual discipline-based classrooms prevailed. As I began to research and read, understanding the benefits of interdisciplinary curriculum, I attempted to introduce the concept to Team A. They reluctantly agreed since the idea was one liked by all and practiced by none, and we gave curriculum planning its own day of the week.

Our first curriculum meeting took place on October 31, 2001. Along with me, only Nathan and Jessica attended the meeting. After fifteen minutes of discussion, Kim and John joined the meeting, and the discussion turned to what we would order for lunch.
Though we were stages away from actually planning a unit together, the original goal was to talk about our curriculum and begin to plan together.

At the next meeting which occurred on November 6th, Kim volunteered to type what each of us covered in our curriculum in a chart so we could begin to see commonalities. She left for another meeting, followed shortly by John leaving Nathan and I to discuss curriculum. The next time we met to talk about curriculum in December resembled the first meeting. Once all members arrived, fifteen minutes had past. We discussed a lunch incident and then one of Kim’s students, and planning did not take place.

In January, the curriculum meeting consisted of Laura explaining the PSSA testing procedures, John updating the team on the fieldtrip, Kim raising concerns over two students and Nathan making a protein shake. Near the end of February, Nathan and I decided to plan a unit together since other team members rarely came to curriculum meetings. We worked at that meeting, and later outside school, to put together a unit we called “Apollo 8 White” (See Appendix I). Focusing on communication skills which we both agreed were classroom goals, one class became a mission control room while the other launched into space as Apollo 8W. Through the use of radios and computer instant messaging, the classes worked together to successfully launch into space and return safely.

The idea of a curriculum meeting was abandoned completely in February; Nathan and I continued to plan together. After a unit in 2002 called “Career Exploration” we decided to re-think the idea of curriculum integration (See Appendix J). Though the goal of the unit was commendable-- to explore careers and have students begin to think about
their future-- we agreed that designing units for the sake of integration was not our original goal. Nathan and I decided to focus instead on ways our own curriculums naturally overlapped. This proved to be a struggle which we abandoned for the year in favor of planning a three day field trip to Virginia.

The following year Team A once again set aside a “curriculum day” devoted to discussion and planning integrated units. The first meeting took place on December 4th since all previous curriculum days were cancelled. We discussed the Washington field trip. Were we giving kids back money if they were denied? Do both buses have videos? Can they bring book bags on the busses? With twenty minutes remaining, the team collectively agreed to table curriculum for another day. Chrissy said, “I have an idea. Let’s talk about curriculum on the buses with the walkie-talkies.” Everyone laughed, and it was the last formal curriculum meeting until March 11th. Jessica, Nathan and I sat in my room and began to talk about the inflexible nature of our curriculums, especially math. Chrissy came into the room, “Oh, I didn’t know we were supposed to meet today.” Nathan replied, “Today’s Tuesday, curriculum day.” “OK then. See you guys later.” As she turned to leave Nathan stopped her, “We’re planning a unit for PSSA week when we can’t give tests or homework. You can stay if you want since you’re kids will be involved.” Chrissy replied that she was busy and did not stay for the meeting. The unit we planned called “Unsolved History” pitted science against history with the culminating unit a class debate over the accuracy of science versus history (See Appendix K).

Nathan voiced his concern over the lack of interest in curriculum meetings. “Everyone agreed to do this, but no one shows up. Yesterday Chrissy questioned our unit and gave suggestions, and I told her she could have come to the meeting. It seems like no
one is willing to say ‘I’m not interest in doing this’ so they pay us lip service. That doesn’t help because then we set aside the time, show up to meet and wait around for no one. It goes back to poor communication. If nothing else we could do Colonial Day.”

Two years earlier the team took an idea I brought from a conference called “Colonial Day.” It was a very successful unit which all agreed the kids learned from and enjoyed. They played the parts of early colonists culminating in a tavern setting complete with food, drink and even homemade candles made in science class. The following two years the unit was mentioned but never planned.

Though integration never took place outside science and language arts, parallel teaching occurred. John discussed the Renaissance as I taught Romeo and Juliet even though it was not a part of his curriculum. During a poetry unit, I took students outside to see the rockets launch which they built in science, and students wrote rocket inspired poems. During my teaching of The Giver, Nathan discussed the color spectrum as students came to understand that the community saw only in black and white.

Despite minimal cross-curricular connections and some success with Language Arts-Science integration, I voiced my desire for more than two subject integration. In the fall of 2003, I voiced to Team B my desire to plan together. We discussed the problems inherent in the curriculums and that they did not overlap. We also discussed the time concerns. The consensus was, as a new team, our resources would be better used getting to know each other’s teaching styles and putting new procedures in place. Curriculum could be held off until the following year.

For the sake of peace and determined to make Team B as effective as possible, I have buried my desire to plan units and relate my curriculum to each of the disciplines on
my team. The only units executed this year will be those already in existence which integrate science and language arts as Nathan seems to be the most willing to integrate.

The final component, curriculum, along with the other ten components, each contribute in their own way to the effectiveness of interdisciplinary teaming. Was Team A effective? Is Team B effective? By describing each as it relates to my notes, interviews and artifacts, I will answer that question with the hope of applying its answers other teams in similar situations, or ones who hope to avoid situations such as the ones I’ve described.
9.1 Summary of Clusters/Components of Teaming

Effective teaming is dynamic. Multiple components are necessary for effective teaming to occur. The following components of teaming arose throughout my research as important and interrelated:

Cluster 1: Team Management

Productive meetings, time, team leader and administrative support

Cluster 2: Team Personnel

Commitment to teaming, personality, communication and trust

Cluster 3: Team Objectives

Shared goals, focus on students, interdisciplinary curriculum

Each component in some form affects Team 8 Orange. Teams need time to meet and plan. Nancy Flowers proposes “that the more a team works on these [coordinated team activities] the more likely they are to regularly influence classroom instruction” (54). On the MiddleWeb Listserv, John Lounsbury weighed in on a teaming discussion under the subject “team ineffectiveness” by stating, “A second reason for the ineffectiveness of teams is lack of adequate common planning time apart from that considered personal planning time” (Lounsbury). The meeting is essential to a teams’ effectiveness, and Team A did not run productive meetings. At effective team meetings teachers “stay on task, eliminate distractions, manage hostility, respect differences, retire useless practices, establish priorities and evaluate results” to name a few techniques (Forte and Shurr 103). With team members arriving late to meetings and not attending
others, we found it difficult at times to make decisions. Some were held to future meetings, and when decisions were made, they were often re-discussed or changed when the entire team was present. Team B keeps a binder with meeting notes and each meeting begins by addressing old business. The difference between Team A and B at meetings reflects the accomplishments of each group. While A did not take meetings as a serious part of teaming and conducted them when necessary to accomplish tasks, Team B utilized each day to get work done but also implement new ideas and make old ones more efficient.

School teams are not the only ones to value meetings as a part of team effectiveness. A management journal, used by an engineering firm, lists under the heading “Team Effectiveness” important guidelines for meeting such as creating an agenda, starting on time, stating expectations and defining roles, negotiating changes in agenda items, ensuring focus, listening, and keeping the group moving and on schedule (PMSJ 2002).

Team A did not follow many of these “guidelines” such as when members came late or do not show up at all for meetings. The frustration with these practices is evident from a reflexive fieldnote dating January 7, 2002:

I am frustrated that for some reason or another not all team members were present. Can we pick and choose meetings? We don’t reflect on team practices, some of which are outdate, we don’t work toward goals, or talk about what benefits students. Does anyone care about the team or just themselves? Forget about my interviews. I feel like I’m imposing on people when I ask them about it even though that asking is rare. I began
this to highlight the joys of teaming, but wonder if I was crazy. Can teaming really work?

That final question is one I’ve asked myself numerous times over the course of this study. All team members on both Team A and B believe teaming can and should work since its advantages are numerous. “A group can always get more done than one person,” said Nathan. Both Laura and John mention the advantage of support for each other and for the students. Llamar agrees, “When six people work together, have each others’ back and offer each other professional support, only good things can come of it.”

In order to support each other, however, members must constantly communicate. When more than one person talks at a time, as was the case at many of Team A’s meetings, it is impossible for communication to take place. At one meeting, “everyone began talking at once” according to my notes. Communication involves listening as well as speaking. When I cut short a team member during one meeting, I was told by Nathan, “Let him finish,” at which point I knew effective communication was not taking place.

Each team member comes to the team with a different background and set of values, and takes to the meetings his or her own strategies to resolve conflict and communicate with each other. Laura attempted to solve disagreements by yelling. When she raised her voice at meetings, the outcome varied from people getting up and leaving the room to others raising their voices as well. Neither practice furthers team objectives or contributes to effective teaming.

Communication flows easier if team members are seated to allow for effective communication. While Team A sat scattered with some members rather far away from each other, Team A each day sits in a circle. The circle does not project more importance
on one member over another. Each person sits similar distances from the others. Facing each other, the speaker is able to better communicate to the group. We communicate not only with words but with gestures and facial expressions. Team A members could be found at meeting rolling their eyes or turning their back while one person spoke to the group (Fieldnotes 2003). This non-verbal communicate tells the speaker his/her words are not valued or that their audience has stopped listening. Similar activities such as grading papers or tests while a meeting takes place also conveys to the group that there are more important things to complete aside from the meeting. Team B rarely engages in these types of activities and, on the rare occasion when a person must complete a task he or she tells the group and sometimes even apologizes up front for bringing other business to the meeting.

Team A could have been more effective. Nick, our principal and team administrator during the course of the study, sees the problems of Team A as multi-dimensional. “It all goes together, all of the reasons why teams work well or do not work well together. Over the last few years, you had some problems.” When I asked him to elaborate, he pointed to personality conflicts and emergence of cliques. I showed surprise at this insight into what I thought was a problem outsiders to the team did not notice. He believes Team A’s trust broke down, with people working against each other rather than together. “They stopped listening,” he said.

I echoed this idea of factions and mistrust Nick mentioned during our interview in a reflective note to myself:

I keep thinking of the show Survivor as a comparison to the team. In so many ways it deals more with people and their relationships than anything
else. I see factions, backstabbing and other similarities which shape the
dynamics of the team. I’ve been focusing on team meetings, but there are
other times when this dynamic comes into play. At lunch, for example.
Nathan and I eat downstairs in the faculty cafeteria, and the remainder of
the team eats in the planning center. We are the only 8th grade team broken
up in that manner at lunch. Is this an accident? Also, when we have
period off, where do people go? They certainly do not come together as a
team. I’m beginning to see personality play a prominent role with all
other factors taking a backburner to it. (Fieldnotes 2003)

Using these notes, I later interviewed the team individually asking them about eating
separately, working separately on planning periods and the role of personality. All saw a
connection between where members eat and socialize and the team composition. Laura
said, “I think we all get along, to a point. I don’t know if being separate sometimes makes
a difference. I think it does.” Nathan was more outspoken, “Those factors absolutely
impact the team. I’ve never been on a team that separated itself in so many areas. I don’t
think it’s good for team morale, but I don’t think there’s much team morale this year to
begin with. Personality wise, it’s not a great match.” Author Jeanine P. Jones includes
these type of activities as a benchmark of mature teams, “Mature teams constantly
nurture the relationship among team members.” She says mature teams socialize
together, sometimes out of school and other times throughout the school day such as
“eating lunch together, sitting with one another at faculty meetings, or bringing snacks
for after school grading sessions (213).
In contrast, Team B does these things together. When one member does not join
the others for lunch, it is noted by the team. Last week when Sara did not arrive at lunch
until 20 minutes into the period, all team members made comments such as “Glad you
can join us,” and “Where’ve you been?” Team B shares planning periods together
always sit together at faculty meeting or school functions (Fieldnotes 2004). Sara said of
the camaraderie of Team B, “I think it’s fantastic. We are really a team. When I come
here I’m with you guys, and always know what I say is safe.” Each member agreed
adamantly that they trust the others. Llamar believe “having each others back” is central
to effective teaming, naming it as the most important factor for interdisciplinary teams
(Interview 2004).

Like the show Survivor which I earlier compared to Team A, I see the reason for
the breakdown in trust and constant personality clashes of Team A as a result of
mismatched goals and non-commitment to teaming. Laura said repeatedly, “How about
less meetings? Once a week sound good?” (Fieldnotes 2002) And while all Team A
colors saw advantages to teams, actions and words did not always match. John said,
“Camaraderie and supporting each other are major benefits of teaming” (Interview 2002).
On the other hand, the camaraderie had never been less evident than in 2002-2003.
While I wanted to improve the team, meet more, plan together and be as effective as
possible, not all team members shared these goals. Nick believes this hampered the
teams’ effectiveness. “You want so much out of the team, and not everyone wanted that.
You turned them off, and I think they stopped listening to you” (Interview 2004). While
I wanted to set goals, Team A saw this as an unnecessary practice. “What for?” one
member asked. It was apparent our visions of teaming did not match. Left undisputed,
the separate philosophies of teaming drove a wedge between team members. John Lounsbury, an authority on the subject of teaming, says, “Of course, there is always the question of whether the teachers involved are really committed philosophically to the concept [teaming] and realize the potential for improved student learning that is there with teaming. It requires them to change and that is always difficult” (5).

For example, in 2001-2003, only Nathan and I planned units together. Since the previous years’ Colonial Day, few Team A members attended curriculum meetings and by planning solely together, Nathan and I separated ourselves from the team. This separation only drove the team further apart. However, we designed three successful units which served their purpose in providing instruction for students which was integrated, purposeful and highlighted connections between subject matter. Interdisciplinary instruction, a benchmark of teaming, existed only between language arts and science on Team A. Although some parallel teaching did occur, integration did not.

I began this study with a literature review of interdisciplinary curriculum since most team experts agree integration between subjects is a benefit of interdisciplinary teams. Jerry Rottier believes teaming must either be improved or eliminated. He advocates more time planning interdisciplinary units and less time on “administrative tasks.” He admonishes teams for “whining about the behaviors of students” and encourages them to “focus on specific plans to assist those students with special needs” as well as “improve instructional and curricular practices” (214-215). Team A and B both spend more time with administrative tasks than planning. Since teams were created in part as a organizing structure to support interdisciplinary planning, more time should be spent on planning than our team does currently. An informal poll of the teams in our
school reveals that Team 8 Orange is not unique. While few teams do plans interdisciplinary units together, most admit this is a small part of the overall curriculum and little time is taken from team planning time to actually plan. Other teams do not plan any units together at all. The period is called “Team Planning Time” which implies planning can or should take place, though it rarely does on my own team.

Unfortunately, neither Team A nor Team B understands interdisciplinary curriculum or instruction as necessary ingredients to effective teams or beneficial practices for students. Llamar asked during an interview this year, “Why do you think that’s so important?” and Luke said, “I don’t know about all that integration stuff.” None value it as a benefit of teams who are given planning time each day. Nathan believes one of the reasons interdisciplinary planning is held in low esteem by teams lies in the lack of administrative support for it. “They [administration] care about test scores, and that is what they’re focused on. In the old days we had two planning periods, one individual and one team. Now, with only one together, by the time we meet with parents and take care of administrative chores there’s not a lot of time left.” Gordon Vars, a prominent voice in middle school, agrees: “Organizing a school into interdisciplinary teams is expected to facilitate curriculum integration, but the sheer logistics of team operation often leave little time or energy for planning occasional interdisciplinary units, not to mention full-scale curriculum integration” (12). Nathan is not alone in his evaluation of the conflict between team logistics and intentions.

Time, as a component of effective teaming, plays more than one role. Time to plan is essential. Team A and B have the same amount of time for meetings, yet Team B meets more often than A. We use each of the five planning periods--Monday,
Wednesday and Thursday are similar meetings. A variety of issues are discussed, as previously described, while on Tuesday the team meets with administration and Friday the meetings are more laid back. In general Friday meetings are shorter and more time is spent on personal issues. Though a meeting schedule was set earlier in the year, this has fallen by the wayside. If all five meetings days are utilized, we accomplish more as a team. In previous years, Team A decided to forgo meetings thereby accomplishing less as a team.

In addition to time for meetings, the time teams spend together factors into their effectiveness. A teacher on another 8th grade team who considers his team as an effective one for students agrees time together is important. They have been together for over ten years and have most procedural and administrative tasks “down to a science.” On the other hand, new teams must use the time provided to them to iron out procedural tasks. Luke recently asked, “Do you guys want to get together over the summer? Now that we’ve been together for nearly a year, we can look at some of what we’ve done.” All agreed. I said, “That’s a great idea. We can look back at things we’ve put in place, see what we want to keep, change or get rid of.” Sara thought meeting to discuss procedure was a good idea: “We have a lot of little things to look at, like meeting procedure and other stuff like our goals. We could probably use more than a day” (Fieldnotes 2004). The process of developing a team is ongoing, and Team B seems willing to make a commitment to improve the team for next year.

“Successful teams, whether in educational settings or corporate America, require training, time and a system that is designed to support them” (Turk 22). A supportive system and training both reflect back on administrative support. No team members
received any training associated with interdisciplinary teaming. Nick would like to train teachers but said, “With the flex program, I have no in-service days I can devote to teaming. Faculty meetings are not sufficient for the training we’d need.” While including teaming on a list of building goals, Nick also supports the teaming concept by working against the idea of moving away from middle school toward a junior high school. Recently, the district moved 6th grade back to the elementary setting and there is talk of moving 9th grade down to the 6th and 7th grade buildings. These do not reflect changes in philosophy but instead a growing districts’ solution to rising costs and building configurations. In addition, an increasing focus on high stakes testing such as the PSSA’s draws attention and focus away from teaming and its improvement. More and more class time and planning time is being used to address issues regarding testing and taken away from improving team effectiveness. These practices threaten to break up the team structure.

Outside forces are not the only ones which threaten teams. Without a commitment to teaming and focus on students, teams are wasting their time. Team A’s primary commitment was to their individual disciplines. By arriving late to meetings or not attending them at all, not expressing interest in team-driven activities, failing to attend curriculum meetings, agreeing to meet less, and admitting team contributions could be better, some Team A members did not display a commitment to interdisciplinary teaming. Laura admitted she did not contribute to the team much, “I do what’s required, go to the meetings, that’s about it.” Chrissy admits “value conflicts” make it difficult for her to actively participate in all team functions.
Nick began a recent interview with a seemingly obvious statement important to understanding team effectiveness: “If teachers’ don’t buy into it, it’s hard to have a good team.” Valuing teaming and staying committed to improving teams are essential for effective teaming to take place. Team B, a more effective team than A under the criteria outlined above, will itself fall prey to stagnation without committing itself to improvement. Meeting over the summer and participating in this study willingly and openly show a desire toward improvement. In a recent discussion with a 7th grade team one member noted she thought the most important factor in team effectiveness was whether or not the teachers wanted to team. While no Team A teacher openly discussed displeasure with teaming itself, some of their action told the other team members they would rather be other places at times during team meetings; failing to arrive at meetings also leads members to the same conclusion. Team B has openly discussed the drawbacks and benefits of teaming and each member concludes they would prefer to team and are willing to work toward improving the team.

Even the most well-intentioned team, without a focus on students, falls short of its intentions. As I mentioned earlier, the components which emerged in this study are interrelated. Focusing on student achievement and sharing goals must come together for effective teaming. “To move beyond the rudiments of teaming in order to improve student learning, teams must set for themselves specific goals to direct their efforts” (Erb and Dickinson 533). Team B, unlike Team A, set goals for the year. This was one area I saw my own contribution as a teacher-researcher. Understanding the importance of setting goals, I was able to encourage the team to do so and working toward those goals gives us a focus and ability to assess our progress at the year’s end. While these goals
focus on getting to know each other as a new team, goals which include student achievement must be present in the future for Team B to claim effectiveness under the umbrella of interdisciplinary team teaching. The future of Team B looks promising, “I try to be open and willing to try new things. I like new ideas and am ready to grow and work with the team” said Sara recently. Llamar put it more succulently in reference to the future of Team B and his role as a team member, “I’m nothing if not a team player.”

One of the factors Team B attributes to an effective first year is a planning center. Lacking in previous years, the team was assigned a planning center for team meetings. Originally we saw this as a hindrance; since all team rooms were being used 2nd period, we were without a home. That inconvenience, however, proved to be an asset. Without any other place to go, team members are forced to be at the meeting on time. Location proved an important factor in successful meeting. Rarely is anyone late and not once has any team member missed a meeting. When Team B stayed after school one day to talk about teaming, they all agreed the lack of a team classroom during planning time was a good thing. “Not having rooms forces us to meet,” Llamar said after Sara pointed out, “It’s a neutral room and we’ll all meeting in one place, everyday. We can keep our team materials and hold meetings there” (Interview 2004).

At that same meeting the team highlighted what they think effective teams looked like. They stressed training and wondered if we could go to a team conference of some kind. They always warned that training does not guarantee success and the members’ commitment and communication skills were almost more important(Nathan, Interview 2004). We shared philosophies and all agreed responsibility and self-discipline were important lessons for adolescents on the cusp of young adulthood. They also mentioned
food as an important part of the team. Curious, I wondered how this was possible. Luke said, “A team that eats together, stays together.” I teased him about our shared Italian roots, but also privately acknowledged his cultural heritage as it related to the team.

Originally, I never intended a comparison between Team A and Team B, not knowing of course Team B would exist. With Team A looking and acting so differently from how the literature told me a team should behave, I wondered for the first time if my team was effective. I took for granted we were and how we teamed was the way most team teachers behaved. Since that time, I realize how just one person can change team dynamics. With the addition of three new team members, the face of Team 8 Orange changed dramatically this year. I could not help but draw a comparison when many of the behaviors of Team A were not present on Team B. It is impossible, though, to point to one component as the root of Team A’s problems. As the components are interrelated, so too is the team multidimensional. None of the members of Team A intentionally set out to render the team ineffective. None wanted anything but success for their students; because a team involves people within unique backgrounds and values, it is impossible to point to any one factor as the cause of team problems.

9.2 Improving Team Effectiveness

While guidelines do exists to guide teams, a first year team, for example may consider success the creation of team goals and a common discipline policy which works and while another veteran team may define success based on the creation of a new interdisciplinary unit. “Team effectiveness and team activities will vary from site to site because implementation of interdisciplinary teams is unique to each location (Forte and Schurr 82). All can be more effective, even though already successful by their own
standards. “Mature teams often become complacent after reaching a high level of success” (Jones 219). Whether a team is new or has been together for years, all can move forward. Team B, a highly effective new team, took their first step in moving forward by discussing what they can do to improve for the following school year. We include the following on our list of priorities: continued communication, spending time together at meetings and otherwise, setting and evaluating goals, and keeping a sense of humor (Interview 2004). Though personally I would add interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction among these goals, I’ve learned another important component as a team member—compromise. I’ve put my own desire to plan with the team on hold, acknowledging for the present other components may take precedence.

Those units we planned that I do consider interdisciplinary met the needs of students by helping them to see connections between subject matter. The language arts curriculum specifically defines communication as a goal of 8th grade, but gives freedom to the teacher in choosing how to teach communication. When Nathan suggested communication as a theme for a potential unit because it was necessary for the component he was teaching at the time, I saw it not as an add-on but a valuable cross-curricular topic. We decided not to limit the unit Apollo 8 Orange to one form of communication. By using the computer, the computer control commanders typed directional notes to each other which needed to be relayed to the Apollo team. They relayed the information verbally, as the flight and mission control commander also engaged in verbal communication on walkie-talkies giving and receiving instructions. The language used and mode of delivery, as well as listening skills of the team, ensured a safe take-off, mission and landing. In all cases, missions which failed were traced back
when we de-briefed the team to a lack of communication. Using science, math, and language arts, students learned skills which broke down curriculum barriers and applied to more than one discipline. This particular integrated unit involved two teachers, three disciplines and lasted three days.

The “Career Explorations” unit similarly integrated science and language arts as careers which engage both disciplines were explored while students applied the knowledge they learned in class to real-life situations. With “Unsolved Histories,” we combined science, history and language arts. Students watched clips of a Discovery Channel show titled “Unsolved History” which attempted to explain historical events through science. Gathering in writing evidence for a pre-determined position, students debated each unsolved history taking the side of either science or history. This unit came about while I looked for topic to debate in language arts and Nathan tried to demonstrated to students how science is used in their everyday lives. Each unit, involving two teachers, lasted less than one week and integrated multiple subjects. Even while these units were being designed and executed, Team A did not express an interest in planning similar units or being involved in those Nathan and I were planning. The factor cited which inhibited most members from joining or adding to these teaching units was time. Nathan and I planned for weeks, sometimes outside of school, for each interdisciplinary unit we taught together. And while we both understood benefits of integration, the other team members did not believe the benefits compensated for the time it took to plan. I draw this conclusion based on the fact that all team members, both A and B, agree interdisciplinary curriculum and instruction benefits students.
Despite setbacks, I am determined in my desire to plan together since curriculum integration, from parallel teaching to full integration, remains an important component to effective teaming. “Middle level school leaders and teachers who were successful in bringing about structural/organizational change in their schools must now exert the same degree of commitment, dedication, and enthusiasm to improving curriculum, assessment, and instruction (Clark and Clark 55). Interdisciplinary curriculum, an earmark of teams from their inception, is a component of effective teaming according to research but not always according to the teams themselves. Jerry Rottier expresses both side of the issues when he says, “Teams must begin to demonstrate that their common planning time can be used not only for discussion of students and housekeeping chores but also to improve instructional and curricular practices” (214). It may take the administration to demand integration before our school and my team begins to integrate disciplines as the name interdisciplinary suggests.

While it is true our administration does not force teams to plan together, it is also true teachers ask constantly for more respect for the profession. That administration and the public do not see us as “professionals” is a common complaint. However, professionals take time to develop their craft, and an abundance of research advocates curriculum integration for improved student learning. While teachers do not like being told what to do, the top down approach many times is the only existing change agent for teachers. With this in mind, I forged a research group last year to look into and discuss some of these issues. However, though interdisciplinary curriculum made the list of topics, it took a backseat to others such as differentiated instruction and, this year, testing. With such high stakes being placed on PSSA test scores, time has been taken away from
the curriculum and resources diverted from other areas, with interdisciplinary teaming and curriculum, already in the backseat, moved to the trunk. If either is to be improved upon, teachers will have to lead the charge as administrators focus on test scores.

Effective teams must integrate not only their curriculums but other components of teaming. They must realize personality does not stand alone and can not be brushed off as a minor problem. In order to be more effective, teams need time to plan and must use the time productively. Teamed teachers should minimize interruptions, lack of professionalism, and distractions at meetings. They must go beyond administrative tasks such as picking a student of the month to focus on student learning and helping all students achieve goals set not by the state but by teachers and curriculum planners. Trust for each other is essential but grown only out of mutual respect, so teamed teachers can not undermine or work against each other behind closed doors. The most effective teams will be led by an administration who values teaming and includes team improve among their goals. Effective teams will move beyond functional, separated by discipline and working under a junior-high school model. Instead, they will value everything interdisciplinary, from teaming to curriculum to instruction. In order for teams to be more effective, they must be together long enough to build the trust, respect and communication skills necessary. Above all, teams must understand the interconnectedness between all these components and realize that effective teams take and time to develop and do not happen by accident.
CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS

10.1 Suggestions for Future Study

Studying one interdisciplinary, middle-level team closely, I was able to draw attention to the daily struggle of teaming. I was not as effective as a change agent as I had hoped, however. First, people were reluctant to read articles and resisted new ideas presented to them. Some resented the ideas because I presented them without, as they saw, any authority to do so. Others were reluctant to institute any new idea which necessitated extra work without extra planning time. Future studies are necessary in order to understand more fully the problems that disable a team. The idea of teachers as researchers, or action research, is appealing to me and might be one way to help teams move away from administrative tasks toward planning more for student achievement. The future of teaming must not only include an understanding of components of effective teaming but find a way to create change when it is needed. We must also figure out how to help teams that are effective but complacent. As the title of one article written by Jerry Rottier reads, “Teaming in the Middle School: Improve It or Loose It.” While I was able to demonstrate ways in which teams can be more effective, we must figure out how to take the steps outlined in this study.

10.2 Conclusions

Many different factors contribute to the success of an interdisciplinary team. Once a team develops shared values of teaming, it must begin to look at teaching and learning in a new way. Working with other teachers, each with unique talents and strengths, the possibility exists for each to learn from the other, improve their teaching
style and offer more to student together than possible alone. Rogers, Bowen and Hainline emphasize the creation of a community where possessiveness of materials, ideas and time does not result in effective team instruction; “There is no place in teaming for exclusivity” (193). Effective teams utilize the space they’re given to manage the variety of activities planned for their students: some days its large group instruction and other days small group. Ideally, with an administration committed to interdisciplinary teaming, teachers receive spaces easily manipulated for this purpose.

What does effective team teaching look like? It looks like teachers visiting each other’s classrooms, exchanging information about students, planning together, and trading teaching techniques (Shaplin 9). It looks like teachers sharing and creating spaces, large ones for seminar-type activities or small ones for independent studies (Lobb 12.) It looks like students in cooperative cross-teamed groups, students on field trips, and unit-ending projects (Dickinson 21). It looks likes teachers planning units based on student questions and investigations, student generated themes, and social and personal concerns (Erb 45). It looks like teachers taking the time to understand fully the entire concept of middle grades education in general, teaming in particular, reading professionally, and receiving staff development (Jones 226). On an interdisciplinary team you see teams setting goals, assessing team growth, planning/coordinating calendars of team events, jointly managing student behavior, planning and conducting joint parent conferences, coordinating use of resources, jointly diagnosing student needs, carrying out coordinated responses to student needs, managing one’s own and the team’s professional growth, engaging in professional dialogue on educational issues, reinforcing instruction across subjects and integrating the curriculum (Dickinson and Erb 537). Effective teams
meet regularly, respect each other and communicate to make the meeting productive. Aware of personality conflicts, they resolve conflict professionally, plan curriculum together and focus on students. The most effective teams have distinct team leaders, are supported by their administration and given time to plan. With a commitment to teaming, effective teammates trust one another and begin the school year by setting goals, and compromising when necessary to make the goals shared ones. Effective teams do not just happen; their members work together as a community and strive for their individualized measure of success.

Interdisciplinary teaming finds itself in a precarious position. When I began my study, Roaring Brook School District listed as one of its district goals an implementation of differentiated instruction. Interdisciplinary curriculum planning and instruction let easily with this goal, but since that time the implications of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the federal law which mandates scores for state funding, have painted a new picture for the future of public schools. The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) test scores have become the focal point of districts and schools statewide. High stakes testing and preparation for these tests have replaced other programs and is now a top priority of my district and therefore my school. How this will effect other educational initiatives such as interdisciplinary teaming and curriculum remains to be seen.

Though I firmly believe in the strength of teaming and its virtually limitless possibilities, we must address other potential problems as well. Jerry Rottier asks the question, “If we are to ensure the continued availability of teaming in middle schools, what must be done?” His solutions include improving the foundation of teaming by establishing measurable team goals, sharing the workload among team members, and
determining ground rules. Teams must also demonstrate greater discipline in the use of common planning time and improved on their capability of making decisions, solving problems and managing conflict. Finally, we must see improved leadership at the team and building levels, provide team members with ongoing staff development (Rottier 214).

In order for effective teaming to take place, team members must start discussing why they teach using certain instructional methods; they must use discussion of philosophy as a springboard for the development of common goals; teams must start working together and planning together. Teams must put the interdisciplinary back into interdisciplinary teaming.

After immersing myself in teaming for six years as a team member, nearly three as a researcher, I firmly believe interdisciplinary teams can positively affect students’ learning and promote both professionalism and support for teachers. In order for both to occur, however, teachers must have the desire to team for students, be willing to communicate, compromise and trust one another; they need time to meet and meetings must be free of interruptions, full of respect and productive for all. Sharing goals, planning units together, and resolving conflicts, teams must maximize their potential by recognizing and celebrating differences, including those of varying personalities, backgrounds and values. With administrative and mutual support, teams can negotiate, survive and cultivate an effective team which together accomplishes more for students than any one teacher could possibly accomplish alone.
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---. “Can Curriculum Integration Survive in a Era of High-Stakes


# APPENDIX A

## RESEARCH SCHEDULES

### Research/TASK Rotation 2001-2002

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Continued

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- **Day 2**: A 242, B 241, C 239, D 236
- **Day 3**: A 241, B 239, C 236, D 242
- **Day 4**: A 239, B 236, C 242, D 241
- **Day 5**: A 236, B 242, C 241, D 239
- **Day 6**: A 242, B 241, C 239, D 236

#### Cycle 4
- **Day 1**: A 239, B 242, C 240, D 236
- **Day 2**: A 242, B 240, C 239, D 239
- **Day 3**: A 240, B 236, C 239, D 242
- **Day 4**: A 236, B 239, C 242, D 240
- **Day 5**: A 239, B 242, C 240, D 236
- **Day 6**: A 242, B 240, C 239, D 236

#### Cycle 2
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- **Day 2**: A 241, B 239, C 241, D 240
- **Day 3**: A 239, B 241, C 240, D 236
- **Day 4**: A 241, B 240, C 236, D 239
- **Day 5**: A 240, B 236, C 239, D 241
- **Day 6**: A 239, B 239, C 241, D 236

#### Cycle 5
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- **Day 2**: A 239, B 242, C 240, D 239
- **Day 3**: A 242, B 236, C 239, D 242
- **Day 4**: A 236, B 239, C 236, D 240
- **Day 5**: A 239, B 236, C 239, D 241
- **Day 6**: A 236, B 242, C 240, D 239

#### Cycle 3
- **Day 1**: A 241, B 242, C 239, D 240
- **Day 2**: A 236, B 240, C 241, D 242
- **Day 3**: A 242, B 241, C 240, D 236
- **Day 4**: A 241, B 240, C 236, D 242
- **Day 5**: A 240, B 236, C 242, D 241
- **Day 6**: A 236, B 242, C 241, D 240

#### Cycle 6
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- **Day 2**: A 241, B 239, C 242, D 240
- **Day 3**: A 239, B 242, C 240, D 241
- **Day 4**: A 242, C 240, D 241, D 239
- **Day 5**: A 240, B 241, C 239, D 242
- **Day 6**: A 241, B 239, C 242, D 240
APPENDIX B

LIST OF TERMS

Alternative Education- A program at RBIS for “at-risk” students. Once identified, a student’s behavior and academic record is tracked for improvement. If no improvement is shown, the parent must sign with recommendations by the administration, guidance and team for alternative placement within the school.

Homebound- Refers to students who are not attending school and receive instruction at home provided by the school district.

Night of Excellence- Parents are invited to the school to view students work in heir various classed.

PSSA- Pennsylvania System of School assessment are standardized tests used for various measures including No Child Left Behind.

Research Exploration (or Research Ex)- Until 2003 this is a period which teachers’ can elect to teach any class from which they feel students will benefit. The team is responsible for one class of students which they must rotate on a 26 day cycle. After 2003, “Research” becomes “Strategies” which is a PSSA prep class.

Strategies- See “Research”

TASC- A period used up to 2003 as a study hall or reward depending on student achievement. After 2003 TASC is used for SSR and then study hall/reward period. ASC is divided by Team 8 Orange into a work, SAFE (2001-2002) or TASC A (2003) room all of which offer more structure and are silent study hall periods with available tutoring from teachers. Reward Room (2001-2002) or TASC B, C, D (2003) allow students more freedom at times rewarding them with walks, movies or other various activities.

TOY- An acronym for “Team of the Year, TOY is a school-wide incentive program. Students earn points for wearing red on pep rally day for instance, and the winning team in each grade goes to Dorney Park.
## APPENDIX C
### MEETING SCHEDULES AND NOTES

### Team Meeting Schedule 02-03

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum</strong></td>
<td><strong>Inclusion</strong></td>
<td><strong>Core Team</strong></td>
<td><strong>Administrative</strong></td>
<td><strong>Curriculum/ Misc.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td>Core Team</td>
<td>Meeting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on</td>
<td>Focus on</td>
<td>Five core</td>
<td>Includes guidance, school problems &amp;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curriculum,</td>
<td>Inclusion-</td>
<td>team members to</td>
<td>policy, ask Nick questions and inform</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>optional</td>
<td>special ed &amp;</td>
<td>discuss team</td>
<td>him of team decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meeting</td>
<td>gifted</td>
<td>issues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

### Team Meeting Schedule 03-04

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core Meeting</td>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td>None/Misc./Fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sample of Meeting Notes in Binder 2003-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team 8 Orange Meeting Notes</th>
<th>Week of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day</td>
<td>Topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TASC POSTER OF RULES

TASC
2002-2003

Rules:

1. SSR (1st 20 minutes) - NO TALKING

2. Come prepared with all necessary materials.

3. Talk QUIETLY about academics.

4. Only two students will be admitted into the library per class.

5. You will only be allowed to leave TASK with a pre-signed pass from a teacher.

SSR

You may read books, magazines, or any other type of articles. However, you must be prepared with your reading materials BEFORE class. Non-reading materials such as catalogs are not permitted.
## APPENDIX E

### TEAM JOBS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### Team Jobs 2002-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cecelia</th>
<th>Nathan</th>
<th>John</th>
<th>Jessica</th>
<th>Kim</th>
<th>Laura</th>
<th>Bob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principals Cabinet</td>
<td>Student of the month</td>
<td>Student of the month</td>
<td>Principals Cabinet</td>
<td>Behavior contract</td>
<td>Principals Cabinet</td>
<td>PTO contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romeo &amp; Juliet</td>
<td>Steamtown</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>Coal mines</td>
<td>Movie</td>
<td>Cardinal midpoints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team letter</td>
<td></td>
<td>IEP meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td>Meeting Agenda Secretary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- September - coal mines
- October - Steamtown
- November - nothing
- December - nothing
- January - movie
- February - colonial day
- March - nothing
- April - R&J, coal mine
- May - Williamsburg, May 31, June 1, 2

#### Responsibilities 2003-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nathan</th>
<th>Leader Sept. &amp; Feb., Student of the Month, Schedule Conferences, Email responder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Leader Oct. &amp; March, Student of the Month, Cardinal Mid-points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Leader Nov. &amp; April, Principals Cabinet Nov, Feb, May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecelia</td>
<td>Leader Dec. &amp; May, Principals Cabinet Oct, January, April, Team, Newsletter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Leader Jan. &amp; June, Principals Cabinet Sept, Dec, March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

LANGUAGE ARTS/SCIENCE INTEGRATED LESSON PLAN

The Mission: Apollo 8 White Lesson Plan

Objective: For students to engage in a variety of group problem-solving activities using various communication techniques.

Materials: Radios, charts, topographic map, stopwatch, fan, three switches and 20 balloons, scenario cards

Mission: The Apollo 8 White crew will travel to the moon and land safely in Swiftwater.

Time: Two days, 30 minute launch

Procedure:

Day One: Set-Up
- Give two-way radios to both Science and Language Arts classes
- Designate Language Arts Apollo 8 White and Science Mission Control
- Assign both classes their groups (See "crew") and describe jobs

Day Two: Launch
- Apollo 8 White flight commander will contact and relay messages to control and his/her crew. The mission is to leave campus, fly to the moon for samples and return safely. Total time from liftoff to splashdown is 30 minutes. The craft has enough fuel for a 40 minute flight. Three tanks hold 40 minutes each of breathable oxygen for 3 people as well as five days of food and water, a survival kit with numerous items, batteries with enough power to run the spacecraft heaters and all other functions for 30 minutes. Any other necessary information will be obtained from mission control.

Mission Control: Swiftwater control commander will contact and relay messages to Apollo 8W crew. The teacher is the control computer. Mission control should also appoint system specialists (see "crew.")
Title: CAREER EXPLORATION- INTRO- PICTURE THIS

Grade: 8th  Subject: Language Arts  Class: ALL  Duration: 45 min.

Purpose
The purpose of this lesson is to explore possible future careers.

Objective
Students will be able to begin thinking about their future and possible careers.

Materials
1. Picture This Worksheet

Procedures
1. Get into groups of 4-5.
2. Look through a magazine and choose a picture.
3. Paste the picture in the middle of the worksheet and brainstorm possible careers and sub-careers associated with the picture.
4. Present the collages to the class.

Questions
1. What types of careers did the groups agree on?
2. Why did you associate the careers with that particular picture?
3. What careers presented to the class would you be most interested in?
APPENDIX H

LANGUAGE ARTS/SCIENCE INTEGRATED UNIT PLAN

Title: UNSOLVED HISTORY

Grade: 8th  Subject: Language Arts-Science-History  Class: A

Purpose
The purpose of this lesson is to explore how forensic science can be used to uncover historical events. The lesson will culminate in a class debate.

Objective
Students will understand the following:
- how to gather and organize evidence to support an argument.
- the need to discriminate between fact and opinion in a persuasive argument.
- to write an opening paragraph of a persuasive argument.
- to debate an issue using evidence to support an opinion.
- how forensic science can be used to prove or disprove accepted historical fact.
- to question accepted historical "facts".
- to examine selected historical events.

Materials
1. Unsolved History Videos
2. Packet of study guide questions and note taking worksheet

Procedures
1. Give study guide to students and introduce the unit. Explain they will read short historical accounts to prepare for class and answer questions on their worksheet.
2. Show "Unsolved History" videos on alternating days in class. Students should take notes on their study guide on the historical facts and forensic science involved in proving/disproving this fact.
3. On the other alternating days, the teacher will discuss writing persuasion, gathering evidence to support an argument, the difference between fact and opinion, how to organize information and how to write a persuasive opening paragraph.
4. Students will organize their information and choose a position: are historical accounts or forensic science more accurate in proving the accuracy of historical events.
5. We will conduct a class debate on science versus history using gathered evidence from the videos.

Assessments
1. Opinion Statement 5 points
   Questions/Answers 3 each/18 total
   Movie Notes 10 each/60 total
   Synthesis
   List of Supporting Details 10
   Categories 3 Introduction 4

   • http://personal.psu.edu/clm293
Cecelia Mecca

Experience

1998–present  Pocono Mountain School District  Mt. Pocono, PA

8th Grade English Teacher

- Teaching responsibilities: writing, reading, oral communication, literature, poetry, team technology director
- Teach on an interdisciplinary team of teachers including inclusion and gifted students
- Serve on various school and district-wide committees including principal’s cabinet, curriculum and teacher-research committee

1996–1998  University of Scranton  Scranton, PA

Graduate Assistant/Part-Time Summer Faculty

- Duties included: teaching computers, composition, written communication and public speaking
- Taught as regular part-time faculty during two summer sessions
- Employed in the Reading Clinic under James Muniz and the English Department under Dr. William Rakauskas

Education

PhD, Curriculum and Instruction, Language and Literacy, August 2004
2000-2004  Penn State University  University Park, PA

Master's Degree, English
1996-1998  University of Scranton  Scranton, PA

Bachelor's Degree, Secondary Education, English
1992-1996  University of Scranton  Scranton, PA

Publications

Contributor to Studies in the Age of Chaucer bibliography, volume 20
Editor of The Enigma, non-fiction, written by Dr. Joeseph Intellisano
Master’s Thesis: The Pseudogeneric Pronoun: From Problem to Possibilities
Doctoral Dissertation: Negotiating Interdisciplinary Teaming in a Middle-Level School Context

Professional Activities

Pennsylvania Middle School Association Board Member
Member of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Member of National Council of Teachers of English
Member of National Middle School Association
Member of various district and school-wide committees
Presenter at state-wide conferences and district in-services

References

On file at Career Services, University of Scranton
Current References Available Upon Request