The Impact of School-Wide Collaboration Systems: Planning for Differentiation

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the Doctor of Education Degree
in Educational Leadership

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Tom and Jean Hodges,

who were my teachers for the first half.

And to Vincent, Mary, Rachel, Claire and Matt,

who are my teachers for the second.
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Abstract

The Impact of School-Wide Collaboration Systems: Planning for Differentiation

by

Juliana Hodges Fabrocini

Doctor of Education Degree

in Educational Leadership

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of daily debriefing and common grade level collaborative planning meetings on instructional preparation for differentiated instruction. The study examined two school wide collaboration systems in a single site across one primary and one upper grade level. A qualitative, phenomenological approach was utilized to understand the experiences of 1st and 4th grade teachers as they use systematic school-wide collaboration methods to plan for meeting the instructional needs of students who comprise a diverse population including students who are typically developing, English language learners, identified as gifted and who have disabilities.
CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The need for teacher collaboration is increasing, given the variety of learning needs found in classrooms across the United States including students with a wide range of languages, ethnicities, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and abilities. According to data from the United States Department of Education, student diversity has continued to increase in general education classrooms in United States schools; 26% of all students enrolled across the country spoke a language other than English at home, 6% were identified as high achievers, and approximately 13% were students with disabilities (U.S Department of Education, 2006).

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 defined more rigorous requirements for students with disabilities to have access to core content in typical classroom settings (Hunt, Doering, Hirose-Hatae, Maier, & Goetz, 2001). Additionally, students who are high achieving require an enriched curriculum that extends grade level content that has been mastered. To address these requirements, there is a need for partnerships among general and special education teachers (Friend, Cook, Chamberlain & Shramburger, 2010, Levine & Marcus, 2007, Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2007) to facilitate collaborative planning, curricular adaptations and extensions that addresses students’ diverse learning needs (Hunt, Soto, Maier, & Doering, 2003). The literature reports increasing collaborative grade level teams established in schools including general education teachers, English language learning specialists, mathematics and literacy.

Effective and structured collaborative processes in grade level teams among general and special educators may facilitate differentiated preparation and instruction throughout a grade level (Subban, 2006, Greathouse & Lincoln, 2008). However, the lack of time set aside for collaborative planning, debriefing and problem solving has been a barrier to teachers meeting the needs of diverse groups (Nevin, Thousand & Villa, 2009, Brownell, Adams, Sindelar & Waldron, 2006). Teachers tend to ‘teach to the middle’, neglecting students on the ends of the learning spectrum; those who require curricular differentiation and those who require curricular accommodation are often left behind (Tieso, 1994). Given the increasing diversity in classrooms today, an examination of practices that support teachers in meeting the needs of a variety of students is timely.

**School Site Studied**

The CHIME Charter School, with California State University, Northridge as a partner, was founded in 2001 to create an inclusive learning environment and demonstrate best practices for students and teacher preparation experiences. CHIME opened with an enrollment of 80 students with a kindergarten through fifth grade model, and currently serves 638 students and their families in an expanded kindergarten through eighth grade span model. Enrollment includes 11% of students identified as gifted and talented, 20% of students with disabilities served by an Individualized Education Plan and 69% of students who are typically developing. English language learners represent 26% of the student population, while 17% of the families representing the student body qualify for free and reduced priced lunch. The school design includes a co-teaching
model where grade level teams comprised of general and special educators plan for, assess, and instruct heterogeneous groups of students together in general education classrooms without pullout instruction. The school model includes related service providers such as occupational therapists and language and speech pathologists who work alongside teachers in the classroom to address targeted student needs while creating a richer learning environment for all students.

**School-wide Collaboration System: Debriefing**

The co-teaching model implemented at the CHIME Charter School uses a high degree of collaboration and teaming throughout all grade levels with general and special educators required to plan, assess, and instruct together. A long standing practice has been daily debriefing in grade level teams at the end of each school day. Five minutes after the school bell rings, grade level teams including teachers, related service providers, and paraprofessionals return to the classroom for a twenty minute roundtable discussion on the events of the day. School administrators rotate to different grade levels allowing them to gain insight to staff perceptions and progress in classrooms. A roundtable format is used in which each participant shares one success and one challenge for the day and colleagues offer comments, support and suggestions.

**Common Grade Level Planning**

The second collaboration system that is embedded school-wide at CHIME is the weekly common grade level planning meeting which includes all general and special education teachers assigned to a grade level. Instruction is based on scheduled planning and preparation that occurs on a weekly with all team members present. Meetings last from two to three hours and occur on a designated day of the week after school. Teachers
plan together in advance of teaching to address assessment, content, instructional
delivery, curricular extension and modifications. Each grade level plans instruction with
activities and student work products that are the same throughout that grade level.

This system inherently requires strong collaboration skills and may facilitate
differentiation. For example, a third grade team comprised of three general education
teachers and a special education teacher within their weekly planning process will
develop upcoming thematic units built around grade level standards. While all members
work together to generate skeletal lesson plans, each teacher then takes one subject area
with which to go deep in preparing activities that are engaging, and require active and
meaningful learning for all students. They prepare for systematic instruction using
common activities and materials for all classes at that grade level. This depth is not
possible when one teacher must prepare lessons and materials for all portions of the
school day alone. Through their consistent and ongoing collaboration with special
education teachers, general education teachers become more knowledgeable about
materials and modifications across class work, homework and assessment, and share
responsibility for preparation. Joint assessment promotes high expectations for students,
and curricular enrichment and modifications that facilitate systematic instruction.

Statement of the Problem

Given the diversity in today’s classrooms (Annual Report to Congress, 2008;
Garafano & Sable, 2008), educators are increasingly implementing collaborative models
to address students’ needs (Austin, 2000). There is a wide variety of peer-reviewed
literature available on the topic of teacher collaboration as discussed in the Chapter II
literature review, including the collaboration among grade level general educators to
promote teacher learning and universal design, the use of co-teaching practices to collaboration among general and special educators, and the examination of collaborative systems within schools to promote curriculum differentiation in grade level teams. The research indicates that collaboration facilitates differentiated instruction, especially when general and special educators plan together. However, little research is available on collaborative models that impact differentiated instruction.

**Purpose and Significance**

Classroom teachers are increasingly collaborating with grade level team members, coaches, paraprofessionals and special educators to address the needs of very diverse populations. The collaborative process is intended to facilitate cohesive instruction throughout a grade level and address the need to prepare curriculum for diverse groups of students. To contribute to the literature, this research project sought to understand the impact of collaboration and specifically debriefing and grade level planning meetings on instructional planning for differentiation.

Debriefing may provide an opportunity for all classroom staff to work together to refine their practice and address individual needs for students with and without disabilities. However, efforts for grade level teachers to plan together have often been impeded by the availability of time. Debriefing may allow for more effective planning discussions and better prepare teachers to be more effective and expedient with the time allotted for planning which could ultimately benefit the instruction of all students. Daily debriefing may also promote collaboration and collegiality to address teachers’ needs to be supported and mentored. Setting aside and using this time may provide a time for parity and respectful exchange of information among the teams.
Common grade level planning meetings can address the need for cohesive instruction across a larger group of same grade students and allow teachers to access each other’s expertise (Nevin, Thousand & Villa, 2009). School systems that require common grade level meetings may ensure the expectation that the meeting take place regularly and provide for accountability among teachers to share responsibilities in planning for instruction. By meeting together to develop plans for instruction, teachers may be better able to address depth and breadth of content as well as providing support for newer teachers as they broaden their own skill sets in curricular domains that are not yet areas of expertise for them (Sisk, 2009). Finally, given limited school budgets, weekly grade level meetings may be a mechanism to provide ongoing collegial support and professional development with little impact on resources.

As a result of this study, researchers and educators may develop a better understanding about the differences between collaboration that is expected to be organic rather than systematized and facilitated within the culture and routine of a school. Additionally the systems described in the study may prove to be replicable and useful in other sites, or these systems could be used to contribute to refinement of existing routine collaborative processes already in place. In conclusion, this study may contribute to the development of a model that can be used to support shared expertise among teachers and ultimately facilitate planning for differentiated instruction to meet the needs of very diverse learners found in classrooms locally and across the United States.

**Research Questions**

This study examines the overall research question: How do school-wide systems of daily debriefing and weekly common grade level planning meetings impact
preparation for differentiated instruction? To address this question, the following five research questions were examined.

1. What information is brought to the debriefing sessions?
2. How does debriefing inform and impact grade level planning?
3. How do teachers perceive the impact of weekly common grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiation of instruction?
4. How do teachers perceive the impact of daily debriefing on planning for students with varied abilities?
5. How do teachers perceive the impact of school-wide daily debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on themselves as reflective practitioners?

Overview of Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to understand the research questions. The intellectual orientation that best represents this is the Interpretive Paradigm. The researcher’s aim is to understand, “the complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live it (Schram, 2006). In seeking to understand the lived experiences of multiple teachers, variance in frame of reference must be accounted for. The challenge with this orientation will be interpretation of what Schram cites as, “offering your own construction of other people’s construction” (2006, p.33). Inquiry into teacher perceptions regarding the impact of routine collaborative systems in schools is a good match for this paradigm because of the nature of collaboration as a lived experience including how things are and how they are understood. In connecting with this paradigm, the research steers towards an opportunity to understand a variety of perspectives. The research tradition that is a match for this inquiry is phenomenology. Since collaborative
mechanisms are a specific context, the goal is to present an interpretation of the perception of different individual’s experience within this process.

The methods used in this qualitative study included observations and interviews. The sample used for examination of debriefing practices included teachers at the CHIME Charter School in two separate grade level teams including primary and upper grades. Grade levels identified were first and fourth to ensure a span of information relating to students of varied ages and the staff who serve them. Within the purposeful sample of identified staff, are seven general and two special educators who comprise the teams of both grade levels. The selection was based on the commitment to examine practices in both primary and upper grades, in addition to the fact that within these grade levels, there is a mix of new and veteran teachers who have worked only at the school and at other school sites as well.

The data sources used for this study include:

1. Observations of debriefing sessions.
2. Observation of planning sessions following observed debriefings sessions.
3. Focus groups conducted with both grade level teams.
4. Interviews conducted with each teacher in grades one and four.

**Limitations**

Generalization of findings from this study may be limited by the following aspects of the research design:

- Researcher subjectivity – the researcher is a former administrator at the school.
- The study is restricted to only one site and the sample will is small.
- Site demographics may not represent other schools.
- The instructional model and level of co-teaching format is atypical.
- Restricted time dedicated to evaluation of the debriefing model.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

The contents of the remaining chapters are as follows. Chapter 1 introduces the study including the statement of the problem, the purpose and design of the study and its significance. Chapter 2 is a review of recent literature. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in the study, including a description and rationale of the sample, data collection procedures, a description of instrument development and methods of analysis of the data. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings, draws conclusions, and makes recommendations. Finally, references and appendixes are provided at the end of the dissertation.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Given the increasing diversity in today’s classrooms, teachers need to provide differentiated instruction to address student needs. Research indicates that collaboration facilitates differentiated instruction, especially when general and special educators plan together. However, little research is available on collaborative models that impact differentiated instruction. This study contributes to the literature by examining a collaborative planning model designed to enhance differentiated instruction. The focus of this literature review is to examine collaborative methods and their impact on curriculum development, instruction, and teacher reflection. First, the need for differentiated instruction is discussed. Second, collaborative planning between general education teachers and between special and general education teachers is examined. Third, collaborative supports are discussed, including co-teaching practices and paraprofessionals. Finally, the chapter concludes with a literature review of the impact of collaboration on student achievement and teacher professional growth. Since the project is designed to examine the effects of daily debriefing protocols and common grade level planning, the issue of time set aside for joint review of practice will be examined among the three topics

The Need for Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is the focus on the processes and procedures that ensure targeted learning experiences for students with varied learning needs (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Differentiated lesson design scaffolds prior knowledge, incorporates interest, and extends expectations to just above the student’s developmental level while
considering readiness, interests and learning profiles (Riddle & Dabbagh, 1999, Hall, 2002, Tomlinson, 2005) At the center of the research on differentiated instruction is the idea that systemic weekly school-wide grade level planning meetings and daily debriefing may impact planning for curriculum differentiation. According to Hall, (2002) differentiated instruction can be defined as a method for teachers to respond effectively to student background, previous knowledge, readiness, language and interests. Tomlinson and McTighe (2006) discuss differentiation as “predominantly an instructional design model” involving “whom we teach, where we teach, and how we teach” which ensures learning for a variety of students (p.3). As teachers prepare for instruction, differentiation requires thought and planning for all of the individuals occupying the classroom. The broad spectrum of students encountered by teachers in today’s classroom including those who are second language learners, high achievers, impacted by socioeconomics, who have disabilities and other learning differences must be met with an equally broad instructional design model, or there is a risk of marginalizing the education of one or more of the groups (Eddinger, 2003).

Villa, Thousand and Nevin (2007) discuss five reasons for educators to consider the importance of differentiated instruction: (1) meeting the needs of diverse student populations, (2) meeting legal mandates including IDEA and No Child Left Behind, (3) ethical values in responsive instruction and access, (4) dispelling myths regarding student potential and improving expectations, and (5) to be effective teachers. This collection of reasons is not exhaustive, but does provide cause for professional refection on evidence based practices. Research indicates better academic and behavioral outcomes for
students when differentiation and collaboration are combined (Cramer, Nevin, Voight & Salazar, 2006; Garrigan & Thousand, 2006; Hall, 2002).

Increasingly, researchers are examining the fit between differentiated instruction and universal design (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). This methodology incorporates standards based curriculum and assessment into the instructional equation of processes and procedures for reaching a variety of students. Curriculum and pedagogy from a universally designed approach means that teachers consider student learning strengths and needs, combined with learning goals from content standards to develop instructional plans that will best meet the needs of all students in their class (King-Sears, 2001; Rose & Meyer, 2000). This approach maintains high standards for all students, and takes into consideration the importance of active participation and motivation to facilitate learning. With systematic assessment of student strengths, interests, and learning needs, teachers design curricular units in which all students can be successful. Universally designed lessons typically integrate visual models, small group projects, manipulatives, use of instructional and assistive technology, hands-on models, and an inquiry-based and constructivist pedagogy (Rose & Meyer, 2000; Strangman, Hitchcock, Hall, Meo, & Coyne, 2006).

Students who are high achievers or who have been identified as gifted require the same thought and planning for instructional access as do students with disabilities who require accommodations (Brighton, 2002). Specialized training, knowledge and teaching experience can add to a teachers ability to “vary learning activities, content demands, modes of assessment and the classroom environment” to meet the learning needs of each student (Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2007, p.8). Universal Design or Understanding by
Design guides teachers in the ways curriculum is constructed. Differentiated instruction requires consideration for who is being taught, where they are being taught and how they are being taught. The blending of the two models can insure a high quality curricular plan with versatile instruction that is accessible to every student (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006, Cox, 2008).

Promoting Collaborative Practices

There is a wide variety of peer-reviewed literature available on collaborative practices and its effect on instruction. Collaboration is a conversational action between teachers to discuss instruction and student progress across a grade level or subject area (Friend, Reising and Cook, 1993). There is a wide variety of research on the topic of collaboration among general education teachers in common grade levels or who teach common subject areas (Goddard, Goddard & Moran, 2007, Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). Other research examines collaborative partnerships are among special and general education teachers to address the learning progress of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Wood, 1998, Friend, Cook, Chamberlain & Shramberger, 2010).

Collaboration Among General Educators

Collaboration can take many forms in schools among professionals. Perceptions regarding what constitutes collaboration are interpretable among different individuals (Friend, Reising and Cook, 1993). Depending on teachers, school structures and school systems, collaboration among educators can be both formal and informal (Marcus & Levine, 2010). There is range of perceptions from ancillary conversations about students and instruction that occur during break times to formal co-teaching structures where teachers actively share single classroom responsibilities (Friend, Cook, Chamberlain &
Levine and Marcus (2009) conceptualized collaboration as “teachers ongoing work with colleagues as a community of practice” (p.390). They further describe effective collaboration structures that allow for veteran and novice teachers to have the “opportunity to see, discuss and actually participate in instruction alongside each other” (p. 390). Little (2002) proposes that within collaborative structures teachers share their work with others through “replay” regarding actual classroom events, or “rehearsal” where the discussion revolves around what teachers or their students might do during instruction. Within the research a constant and consistent theme is that collaboration in any given learning organization, from a single classroom to an entire school district, can exist on a continuum from very structured with times and protocols in place to informal conversations that teachers engage in on breaks.

Hinden, Morocco, Mott and Aguilar (2007) were interested in teacher learning communities surrounding literacy instruction, specifically examining teachers’ problem solving and sharing expertise which is often a void in instructional practice. They cite teacher interactions as “one of the most vibrant shifts taking place in teacher learning...from isolation to long-term collaboration” (p. 350). They studied the relationship between structured teacher conversations after school and the impact on classroom instruction. Using case study methodology, three teachers, who had experience ranging from five to eighteen years, were followed for two years with the study focusing on year two. The goal was to qualitatively examine teacher learning for the development of supported literacy units in language arts classrooms (two general education and one special education) in an urban middle school. The authors emphasized that the focus of the research was not on the initial process of establishing collaborative routines, but on
the group once routines were established. Data collection consisted of transcripts of 12 after school meetings, classroom observations, and teacher interviews.

Findings for this study highlighted the roles that each teacher took within the group including that of ‘community builder’, ‘contributing expert’, and ‘literacy apprentice’ (Hinden, et al. 2007, p. 260-261). These findings indicated that all three teachers fully engaged and benefited from the process and that the different roles assumed were all valuable to the group. However through an examination of transcripts, it was determined that during the 12 times that each group met, the teachers varied widely in the amount of sharing they did with regard to instructional practices. Implications included the determination that the collaborative opportunities were limited and teachers could have benefited from more time together and from the development of systemic structures for equally sharing expertise.

In contrast to assertions made by Hinden, et al., (2007), Levine and Marcus, (2010), studied collaborative practices through a case study in a single school and found team roles and teacher experience less impacting on the process; however, with formal structures implemented teachers together improved outcomes. Achinstein, (2002) found that teachers can view collaboration as a risk to harmony and collegiality with concerns over developing professional conflicts. In their case study, Levine and Marcus (2010) found that school structures designed to support collaboration can address these concerns. These authors further assert that school designed systems that address the structure of collaboration may provide teachers with “the requirements to deprivatize their practice and take responsibility for others’ work” (p. 396). It appears that these structures lend norms and trust to the practice of collaboration which promotes the feeling of safety
when discussing challenges and acknowledged need to improve practice. Levine and Marcus (2010) found that the variety of collaborative systems embedded within the sampled school led to focus on different aspects of education including student learning, professional development for teachers and school wide assessment. Additionally, the authors discussed the need for teachers to be given the latitude to focus on a single aspect of their practice, which might include classroom assessment, math instruction or active learning strategies.

To summarize, the available literature on collaboration among general education teachers to support rich subject matter content and grade level continuity substantiates the benefits of shared practice. The work of Hinden, et al. (2007), is particularly pertinent to the study’s topic as the authors have focused on collaboration for the development of teacher expertise in a single content area without the teachers interacting in the classroom. One of the most interesting aspects of this work is aligned with the debriefing protocols reviewed in this research. In a review of implications for further research, the authors suggest that teachers “did not share their successes and challenges as fully as they might have” (p. 372). This reflection provides a logical step for the examination of daily debriefing in that routine systems embedded within a school may ensure the time needed for the development of trust and comfort level working within such systems.

The research examined in this section indicates that teachers need to engage in more than one type of collaboration simultaneously to impact school improvement. The issue of time set aside for collaboration consistently appears in the literature as a consistent barrier. In a large scale study of urban schools selected for their diverse student populations, teachers collaborating to meet the need of English language learners noted
that lack of time set aside for collaboration was one of the greatest barriers in the
development of teaching teams (York-Barr, Ghere & Sommerness, 2007). These findings
are particularly relevant to the research conducted in this study, given that time is
required for two collaboration structures in this study, daily debriefing and weekly grade
level common planning meetings.

**Collaboration Among General and Special Educators**

IDEA has provided the impetus in moving students from segregated and more
restrictive environments to general education classrooms where they receive instruction
alongside typically developing peers. Friend, et al. (1993) provided a historical and
comprehensive examination of the movement towards collaboration in education. The
authors examined the roots of collaboration and co-teaching dating back to the 1950’s
when teachers began to join together in secondary settings to meet the needs of large
groups of students in a single grade level. In the 1980’s, collaboration evolved into co-
teaching strategies to meet the growing needs of more diverse individuals in classrooms.
More specifically this type of collaboration was targeted to meet the needs of those
students who had learning disabilities or what are considered to be mild to moderate
disabilities.

The aspects of co-teaching cited by Friend et al. (1993) include the need for joint
commitment, established parity, and scheduling. Common practices among the examined
teams describe a variety of ways to structure co-teaching models including five options
that teams can use for co-teaching. These include: “one teach-one support, station
teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching” (Friend et al., 1993,
p. 9). These models are common to the aspects of co-teaching today and illustrate the
joint power of teachers while they are in front of a class, but do not address the indirect need for planning and reflection.

Pertinent to this review is the discussion of time set aside for planning. In reviewing teacher interactions, Friend et al. (1993) noted that in established teams, “Social conversation becomes a decidedly less time-consuming part of interactions” (p. 7). This indicates the move towards more professional exchanges and the trust required to collaborate or share insights, strategies and challenges. The authors reported, “Teachers also share that they experience a sense of professional renewal when they co-teach.” (p. 8). In this early work, there is less examination of time for reflection on professional growth and student outcomes.

Wood (1998) conducted a qualitative study to examine the development of collaborative teams and perceptions of special and general educators about their roles in an inclusive classroom. The author examined individual educator feelings of responsibility and commitment to the educational needs of students with disabilities included in general education classrooms and how their interaction with colleagues impacted the success of the placements. Information is offered from teacher perspectives to identify barriers and avenues to collaborative practices. The author concludes that collaboration can be difficult, particularly given the findings from the study that teacher training focused on autonomy and individual responsibility. The focus here was to consider team development for those new to collaborative processes in including students with disabilities.

Interviews conducted in the Wood (1998) study with both general and special education members of the three targeted teams were conducted twice at the beginning of
the school year and once again four months later. The research did not involve classroom observations. The author also conducted ‘member checks’ to ensure that their interpretation of the interviews were accurate in the participant’s views. In analyzing the collected information, the guiding questions surrounded the teachers’ perceptions of their responsibilities to the students with disabilities. The teachers unanimously saw themselves not as partners, but as holders of different aspects of the student’s program. The perception of responsibility for those aspects shifted as the year progressed. For example, all three general education teachers saw themselves as responsible for social goals early in the year and became more engaged in the instructional program for students later in the year. This example reflects the teachers’ comments about role confusion and overlap as well. All participants noted lack of practice in developing collaborative skills and a lack of training for working together. A record of actual time the teachers spent working together in the classroom may have provided more insight to the barriers of the process of team building.

Following in the vein of examining teaming and collaboration to support inclusive placements for students with disabilities, Dieker (2001) shares research conducted within secondary placements for students with disabilities. In this qualitative study, the author’s purpose was to identify effective characteristics of middle and high school teaching teams posing the questions, “How are teams structured and what practices do they implement?” (Dieker, p. 15). Four different types of data were collected from the nine teams (seven middle schools and two high schools) including classroom observations, records of the amount of time spent planning and interviews with students and teachers. Reliability was reinforced through review of audiotapes and field notes as well as that of an independent
rater who developed categories of common themes from the collected data. Results indicated that the teachers in Dieker’s (2001) study had more time for planning and used part of it to discuss individual student needs. In the nine teams, both students and teachers perceived that expectations remained high for the achievement of all students. The findings emphasized common planning time as crucial to success and that teachers should, “be given time to identify their roles, share curricular expectations, and discuss individual philosophies” (Dieker, p. 20).

In summary, a connection to the topic of debriefing is the setting aside time to examine practice and jointly reflect on student progress. The studies cited in this section relate to the research topic in the area of teachers having time set aside for discussion and reflection with each other which again, is often referred to as one of the most challenging aspect of collaboration in schools (Levine & Marcus, 2010). It seems that this process may be missing in the building of teacher relationships and in the development of trust. Of particular interest in reviewing literature for practices related to the need for debriefing, was the study by Dieker, (2001) describing teams that discussed individual students prior to planning.

**Collaborative Support through Co-Teaching and Paraprofessionals**

**Co-Teaching.** Co-teaching is a method used to facilitate the instruction of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms where they are educated alongside typically developing same aged peers. Co-teaching models, involve special and general education teachers as partners in planning, instructing and assessing students with diverse needs within the general education classroom (Friend & Cook, 2006; Murawski, 2003). Co-teaching is defined as “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to
a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space” (Cook & Friend, 1995, p.2). In a co-taught classroom special education teachers provide expertise in providing specially designed instruction while general education teachers provide curricular and content expertise (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi & McDuffie, 2005).

Within a co-teaching model, the role of the special education teacher includes providing this service directly within a wide variety of class activities, as well as providing support and feedback to both paraprofessionals and general education teaching partners in implementing individualized instruction. As a result, all team members have the opportunity to become knowledgeable about how to best meet each student needs. In a study examining change, commitment and movement towards inclusive practices in two Southern California school districts, planning for instruction was found to be a consistent theme in focus group interviews with elementary and middle school teachers. Researchers in the study found that the use of time differed among the schools examined and that planning was seen as an “essential feature” by respondents in addressing the learning needs of students with varying abilities (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxen, Cabello & Spagna, 2004, p.111).

Co-teaching is the central collaborative system embedded at the site for this study. Although this research does not include an examination of co-teaching practices and the impact on planning for differentiated instruction, co-teaching must be reviewed for two reasons. First, the sampled site uses a rigorous co-teaching model which contributes to the culture of the school and to aspect of teacher perceptions. Second, co-teaching models for instruction can be considered one of the highest forms of collaboration among educators (Fennick & Liddy, 2001). Research from this study may provide insight on the
implementation of collaborative systems that allow for organizational growth, as schools and districts work towards shared expertise and problem solving.

**Collaboration with paraprofessionals.** Information brought to the planning process from all aspects of student need is valuable. Contributions made by paraprofessionals regarding observations and insight to students may be used in planning meetings subsequent to debriefing sessions. Giangreco, Edleman and Broer (2001), studied the experiences of professionals participating as classroom team members. This work identifies the themes of appreciation, trust, value, and the desire on the part of paraeducators to participate in the collaborative process. Giangreco et al. (2001) provide a thorough review of the literature surrounding paraprofessional supports and note that with the exception of one study, all of the research has been qualitative. The authors conducted interviews and observations with paraprofessionals, special and general education teachers, and administrators in four K-12 schools in Vermont, which all had students with disabilities included in general education classrooms and provided paraprofessional support. Reliability was addressed by allowing participants to provide feedback on a draft version of the methods and findings.

Findings from the study indicate that the paraprofessionals who participated were concerned with “the desire to receive respect, feel appreciated, and having contributions acknowledged” (Giangreco, Edleman and Broer, 2001, p.488). Some indicated that they felt they were given responsibilities related to teaching without feedback or support. A major theme was the desire to be heard by and contribute to the teaching team. Interestingly, paraprofessionals who were assigned a classroom rather than a specific student felt more a part of the educational team. This finding suggests that with
assignment to a classroom rather than a student, paraprofessionals may have more time to connect with teachers, which may promote instructional team membership and accountability for the instructional support of all students.

In summarizing the literature on collaboration with and support of paraprofessionals, time for interaction is perceived as a serious barrier (Giangreco, Edleman and Broer, 2001). Paraprofessionals acting and being perceived as part of the educational team may also improve job performance and satisfaction. The research reviewed did not delve into how individual teams communicate or identify systems allocated at any of the schools for collaboration among teachers and paraprofessionals. While paraprofessionals are not included as sampled subjects in the current study, the debriefing practice examined provides for access to and use of information gained from those team members by teachers. Further examination of debriefing may provide information on how the process facilitates understanding roles and expectations for all staff in the classroom and address some of the needs for training and feedback for paraprofessionals.

**Student Achievement and Teacher Professional Growth**

**Collaboration and Student Achievement**

The roots of evaluation of collaboration for teachers to promote student achievement can be found in the 1980’s with school based decision making. Teacher participation in school based decision making was assumed to promote curricular quality, sound instructional decisions targeted at individual school culture and demographics (Ashton & Web, 1986). In an extensive five year study of a Midwestern metropolitan K-8 school district, using data from over 200 classroom teachers and 3,300 students data
indicated positive learning outcomes for students in third, sixth and eighth grade whose teachers were involved in school based management structures (Smylie, Lazarus & Browlee-Conyers, 1996). An even more striking finding from the study conducted by Smylie et al. (1996) was the negative impact that teacher autonomy had on student achievement.

According to Hart, (1998), when educators have experience and understanding of the way a student learns, and operate in isolation, “educational experiences become fragmented, and a student’s needs may go unaddressed” (p.91). In contrast, when teachers have opportunities to access each other’s expertise, Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, (2007) describe a “building on content and pedagogical knowledge to improve instruction (p. 880). From a classroom management and behavioral support perspective, schools where teaming systems are implemented report fewer office referrals and suspensions that schools in which teaming or collaborative systems are absent (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). The aforementioned studies can be used as a base for developing an understanding of the impact of teacher interactions and decision making on student achievement.

More current study of the impact of teacher collaboration on student achievement indicates positive correlations. However, as described in several noted studies when formal school-wide mechanisms for collaboration systems are in place teachers are more likely to work together to address student achievement (Friend & Cook, 2000, Hourcade, Parette & Anderson, 2003, Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). The impact of collaboration for the instruction of students with disabilities has been studied extensively. The collaborative relationships between general and special educators show
promise for positive learning outcomes for students with disabilities placed in general education settings (Rea, McLaughlin, Walther-Thomas, 2002). In 2004, Cole, Waldron and Massoumeh studied six Indiana school districts for outcomes in achievement for students with and with disabilities with a sample selection criteria being collaboration among general and special education teachers. Results from this study indicated that students without disabilities educated in inclusive classrooms alongside peers with disabilities made significantly greater progress in mathematics and reading. This study found no significant differences in mathematics and reading achievement for students with disabilities. However academic progress for students with disabilities, as measured through goals and objectives contained in Individualized Education Plans, showed academic growth at for students with specific learning disabilities.

A systematic review of 14 studies of collaborative professional development concluded that the presence of ongoing professional collaboration was “linked to measured increases in student performance in all studies” (Cordingly, Bell, Rundell & Evans, 2003, p. 4). Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran (2007) found that teacher collaboration was a statistically significant predictor of student achievement in mathematics and reading. This study examined collaboration by surveying 452 elementary school teachers who served 2,536 students in an urban midwestern school district. The methods for this study included teacher responses to a survey on their perception of the levels and intensity of their experiences in collaboration to meet student learning needs and student achievement on individual school state testing measures. The authors conclude that while teacher collaboration may improve a school’s ability to impact student achievement, the relationship is likely to be related to teacher
improvement in instructional practices rather than providing for direct impact on individual students.

The impact of collaboration on student achievement is being examined more and more by researchers with promising outcomes for students with and without disabilities. It is clear that variables such as time and organizational vision impact the rigor with which collaboration is used, along with the perception by teachers of efficacy. This study builds on this research by closely examining the relationship between collaboration and planning for differentiation to investigate connections with practice and support for individual students.

**Collaboration and Professional Growth**

School reform systems and teacher preparation programs have identified teacher collaboration systems as a stimulus for individual teacher growth. In the implementation of systems to promote teacher collaboration, it is important to note that school and district leadership play a role. A policy implementation study conducted by Furney, Aiken, Hasazi & Clark (2005) in 65 schools in Vermont indicated school leader qualities that promoted the development collaboration or ‘teaming’ systems to support professional growth in teachers. Two important themes emerged from the study, including a school leader’s ability to 1) foster shared vision, planning and decision making among teachers and 2) create school-wide collaborative structures. The authors present these themes as approaches to facilitating collaboration among teachers on a school wide basis. In their review of literature pertaining to teacher preparation programs, Nevin, Thousand and Villa (2009), recommend the development of a curriculum for teacher educators to become co-teachers in higher education. These authors propose that modeling the
benefits of collaboration for teacher growth to “permeate collaborative teaching efforts in university classrooms” would not only impact teacher preparation programs, but university instructional practices as well (p.572).

In summary, collaborative practices in education have been the focus of extensive research as professional development systems for teachers in the areas of professional learning communities, (Wegner, 1998), shared instructional decision making (John Steiner, 2000), and reflective practice, (Shulman & Shulman, 2004). In their thorough review of the literature on collaboration as a teacher learning tool, Brownell, Adams, Sindelar and Waldron (2006) discuss that while the benefits of collaboration have been established, “organizational conditions” may stand in the way of “innovation adoption and sustained use”(p.170). These authors assert that all teachers do not learn equally from the experience of collaboration and that there is a lack of research demonstrating, “how beliefs and knowledge about content and students might work together to allow teachers to profit or not profit from professional collaboration.” (p.179). Implementation of collaboration for teacher learning is impacted by organizational structure, requirements and culture (Little, 2002). Teachers who experience cohesive, collegial school communities, report high levels of commitment to teaching all students, high levels of enthusiasm and high levels of innovation (Levine & Marcus, 2010). These points in the literature connect to the examination in this study of collaboration, the impact of differentiated planning and the organizational structures that support it.

Summary

The focus of this literature review was to examine collaborative methods and the impact on curriculum development, and teacher effectiveness. The need for differentiated
instruction is clear, due to the diversity in student learning needs found in classrooms across the United States. There is strong evidence that collaborative planning between general education teachers and between special and general education teachers can impact differentiated instruction. Collaborative supports, including co-teaching practices and input from paraprofessionals have proven to be valuable for both individual students and outcomes for groups of students. Additionally, the impact of collaboration on student achievement and teacher professional growth is gaining attention from researchers with promising outcomes. Within the literature, however, barriers to collaboration exist that warrant further investigation.

This study will contribute to existing literature by examining systems of daily debriefing and weekly grade level planning that are part of the routine function of a single school. Barriers to collaboration that may be addressed in the structures examined include; lack of time, teacher reluctance to give up autonomy, increased communication demands and the development of trust needed to share practice. Findings may provide information on how to address barriers to collaboration, specifically examining structures in establishing specific time for team development to foster trust and ways to facilitate shared planning and instructional decision making.

As teachers jointly examine and address student needs, data from their feedback may indicate the development of professional expertise and collegial support. The examined literature indicates that structured practice in exchanging professional information and viewpoints may help to avoid problems when teachers are expected to work closely together and may promote shared responsibility for student success. Discussions about daily events among teachers along with input from paraprofessionals are not typically embedded in
planning time and the practice of debriefing may allow teachers to reflect on aspects of instruction and individual student need.

Barriers to effective collaboration and structured practice in professional exchanges may be a hindrance to collective responsibility for students and joint planning. There is a historical lack of instruction in collaboration skills in teacher preparation programs that university systems are now addressing. It is possible that embedding a debriefing structure may promote the development of collaboration skills through ongoing practice. Times that are specifically designated to discuss individual student progress and systems for joint planning may be needed to support teachers and keep expectations for learning high.

Current research is clear that a wider variety of professionals and paraprofessionals are being incorporated into classrooms to address the individual support needs of students with disabilities, the issue of leveraging that resource requires attention. Literature in this review examines the benefits of contributions that classified staff members make, and cautions all educators not to leave valuable paraprofessional insights out of the collaborative process. Understanding general education teacher, special education teacher and paraprofessional roles and contributions while planning for the sharing of information, may assist faculty and classroom staff in facilitating more dynamic learning environments. This review highlights the commitment to the study of teacher collaboration and indicates the need for the further examination of structures and protocols to provide for the most effective joint practice.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methods used to study the impact of daily debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on planning for differentiated instruction. As schools and classrooms are becoming more and more diverse, collaboration systems are being implemented to meet the needs of students who come with varied languages, ethnicities, socioeconomic status and abilities. Research on collaboration indicates that joint planning and sharing of expertise can make the classroom a richer learning environment. This examined the routine collaboration systems established in a single school designed to facilitate grade level planning to address the needs of a diverse population. Data were gathered from teachers who were implementing the collaboration model and whose perceptions may add insight into planning for differentiated instruction.

Research Questions

How do school-wide systems of daily debriefing and weekly common grade level planning meetings impact preparation for differentiated instruction?

1. What information is brought to the debriefing sessions?
2. How does debriefing inform grade level planning?
3. How do teachers perceive the impact of daily debriefing on planning for students with varied abilities?
4. How do teachers perceive the impact of weekly common grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiation of instruction?
5. How do teachers perceive the impact of school-wide daily debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on themselves as reflective practitioners?

**Research Paradigm and Tradition**

The intellectual orientation that best represents the perspective of this research is the interpretive paradigm. The aim is to understand, “the complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live it” (Schram, 2006 p.28). As the researcher seeks to understand the point of view and experiences of multiple teachers, variance in frame of reference must be taken into account as well. The teachers sampled in the study had different preparation and professional experiences along with varied backgrounds and instructional philosophies. To study their individual experiences with debriefing and common grade level planning, teacher perceptions needed to be understood. The challenge with this orientation for the researcher was to interpret what Schram cites as, “offering your own construction of other people’s construction” (2006, p.33). Inquiry into teacher perceptions regarding the impact of routine collaboration systems in a school is a good match for this paradigm because of the nature of collaboration and the need to know what the experience is really like, or how things are and how they are understood. In connecting with this paradigm, the researcher will had an opportunity to understand the individual and collective experience of using routine collaboration systems among teachers and the impact on planning for differentiation in instruction.

The research tradition that is a match for this inquiry is a case study approach using a blending of phenomenology. This tradition was required in order to understand the experience of teaching teams within the specific culture of the unique case which is the
selected school. Additionally, the goal is to present an interpretation of the perception of different individual’s experience within the phenomenon of this process. In investigating the phenomenon of collaboration systems and how were used, evidence that specifically relates to the subject’s experience needed to be studied to construct meaning and look for benefits, drawbacks or commonalities. Gathered data came from observing and documenting aspects of the collaborative processes of daily debriefing and common grade level planning meetings.

Research Setting

In this section, the research setting and sampling process for selection will be presented. The school site was selected due to the routine systems of daily debriefing and weekly grade level planning that are systemic and provides a unique opportunity for study. The research setting is The CHIME Charter School, in Woodland Hills, CA, which serves as a public K-8 charter school operating under the educational nonprofit, CHIME Institute. The school’s charter was written by faculty at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) as a result of a collaborative effort among families and the Michael D Eisner College of Education (COE), to develop a charter school designed to meet the needs of students of all abilities from a variety of backgrounds in an integrated model. Inherent to the plan was the goal to create a partner school with CSUN that could serve as a teacher training and preparation site for ongoing collaboration with the COE.

Demographic and Historical Development

In 2001, the CHIME Charter Elementary School opened with an enrollment of 80 students and currently serves 638 students and their families. The school has a high demand for enrollment and entrance is through public lottery with wait lists exceeding
two hundred students in each of the past six years. The school was recognized as California’s Charter School of the Year in 2005 and honored by the national organization TASH, as a model program for students of all abilities in 2008. Academic achievement according to the State’s Academic Performance Index has shown growth with a baseline API score established in 2002 of 698 and a score of 803 for 2010. The school continuously meets achievement criteria for all subgroups in State testing. For the purposes of this study, elementary grades were examined.

For the 2010-2011 school year, enrollment demographics for students in kindergarten through fifth grades included students from 32 different zip codes, with 51% representing students who are white, 19% Latino, 14% Asian, 12% African American, and 4% comprised from other categories. English language learners represent 17% of the student body and the band of socio economic status includes 23% of the students eligible for free and reduced priced meals. A wide representation of ability is reflected in the student population. According to the Charter School’s authorizer the Los Angeles Unified School District’s (LAUSD) standards and protocols, 11% of the students identified as gifted or high achieving, 69% are considered to be typically developing and 20% have disabilities. According to service provider logs, documented in Special Education School Accountability Caseload (SESAC) reports required by the Special Education Local Planning Agency in Los Angeles, approximately 12% of the students have mild to moderate disabilities (other health impairments, specific learning disabilities as well as speech and communication needs) and 8% of the students enrolled have what are considered to be moderate to severe disabilities (including autism, cognitive, physical, sensory impairments as well as multiple disabilities).
**Instructional Model**

The school’s design includes a collaborative co-teaching and teaming model where grade level teams comprised of general and special educators plan for, assess, and teach students together in general education classrooms without pullout instruction. Grade level teaching teams comprised of special and general education teachers meet weekly to plan for common instruction across the grade level and to ensure teaming and access to shared expertise. The school model also includes a plan for embedded related services with occupational therapists and language and speech pathologists working alongside teachers in the classroom to address targeted student needs while creating a richer learning environment for all students.

**Collaboration Structures**

**Common Grade Level Planning.** A plan for weekly collaborative grade level planning meetings was included within the design and model of the school as written into the original charter in 2001. This long standing practice at the school requires the general and special education teachers in a grade level to meet on a weekly basis to develop common lessons across all classrooms in that grade level. These meetings occur after school on a day chosen by the team and last between 1.5-3 hours. During this block of time, teachers review standards, sequencing and develop common lesson plans. The planning structure was designed for the purpose of sharing ideas as well as division of the workload for preparation of materials. The expectation is that all classrooms in a grade level have common lessons and student artifacts and work samples as well as common rubrics for assessment. The execution and daily schedules are left up to individual teachers.
Debriefing. During the first year of operation it became evident that the need for collaboration to serve such a diverse group of students was not being met in a systematic way. Teachers noted that designated weekly planning time was often impacted by the need to debrief student successes and challenges in an ongoing way. Additionally, anecdotal data regarding daily happenings with students both in and out of classrooms, observed by paraprofessionals was unshared or shared one to three days after the observations. To support the teaming efforts, a daily debriefing protocol was developed from medical and preschool models that had been studied by the school’s founders.

In the first year, systems for debriefing were embedded at the end of each school day with all adults who participated in the classroom meeting for fifteen to twenty minutes. On Mondays through Thursdays, all grade level classroom staff reports to a designated classroom to discuss the events of the day in a roundtable format that requires each participant to share successes and challenges regarding their own practice or work with individual students. During this time, colleagues simply listen or offer brief support and feedback. Several teachers have reported prior to the beginning of formal study that it may be, that this time also allows for a ‘clearing of the air’ in the event that team members struggle with collegial issues during the day. Most importantly, an examination of this process may have connections to more effective and expedient planning as well as providing more insight to individual student needs.

Research Sample

The sampling design was appropriate due to the unique conditions existing at the site where school-wide collaboration systems are in place. The system at the selected school is unusual due to the specific requirements for daily collaboration and weekly
grade level planning are embedded into the school’s routine and culture. The examination of the perceived effects of collaboration systems on instructional differentiation in a school was a result of the researcher’s own experiences with the need to foster collaboration among grade level teams. In designing this study, the researcher reflected on the systems that were specifically embedded in the site.

**Ethical Considerations in Selected Sample**

In evaluating the challenges of studying a site where the researcher was the school leader, there are a number of obstacles to consider and address. The researcher was no longer an employee of the charter school during the year the research was conducted. As the former school leader, the researcher worked to address subjectivity as well as presence as the primary investigator to ensure that data collected through interview, observation and document review was accurate and free from bias. As such, the researcher had a vested interest that the systems that she had facilitated and supported are perceived to be valuable. There is also the concern that the teachers sampled in the study will want to please and feel pressure to give ‘desired’ answers.

The researcher addressed these concerns by providing a clear description of the role of researcher, and by developing a new rapport with teachers, through a thorough sharing of the commitment to learn from others and their perception of the debriefing and grade level planning processes along with their value and effects. The researcher communicated with all staff in the form of updates on progress in collecting and evaluating data. Member checks engaged participants in review, comment and sharing of the documentation of interviews and observations, which helped to remove some of the ethical concerns that might surround the study.
During observations and interviews, the researcher had to be cognizant of the fact that conducting the study was likely to affect her. In identifying these effects there are three areas that the researcher monitored. First, as an administrator, opinions of staff members and what are considered to be their areas of strength and need professionally were monitored. The researcher maintained the role of observer in debriefing sessions and clearly defined when attending debriefing sessions in studied grade levels, that she was present in the role of a researcher. Information on the study was given to all teachers involved and informed consent from each teacher was obtained in individual meetings. The second impact of subjectivity is that the researcher was likely to have faith in the current system of the round table format and sharing successes and challenges, subjectivity will need to be suspended on the format used for debriefing during data collection and analysis (Mills, 2007). In seeking information on the effects of and how to improve the process, the researcher was no longer a staff member and was able to minimize bias in evaluation of the data by fully occupying the role of researcher. According to Bloomberg and Volpe, (2008) a researcher can work to mitigate bias “through “member checks”, by sending “transcribed interviews and summaries of conclusions for participants to review” (p.77). All teachers were provided an opportunity to review transcribed interviews, field notes and coding.

**Research Sample and Data Sources**

The sample used for examination of debriefing practices and grade level planning included teachers at the CHIME Charter Elementary School in two separate grade level teams including primary and upper grades. Grade levels identified were first and fourth grades to address maximum variation among students and ensure a span of information
relating to students of varied ages and the staff who serve them. Within the purposeful sample of identified staff in grades one and four, were seven general and two special educators who served in each of the two grade levels. The selection was based on the commitment to examining practices in both primary and upper grades due to the specific curricular differences in literacy and numeracy acquisition in curricular planning (Henry, 2003). In addition, the fact that within these grade levels, there were a mix of new and veteran teachers who have worked only at the school and at other school sites addressed teacher experience with regard to perspective in relation to the culture of the school.

**Data sources used for this study included:**

1. Observations of debriefing sessions
2. Observation of grade level planning sessions.
3. Focus groups conducted with each of the two grade level teams.
4. Interviews conducted with each teacher in grades one and four.

These data sources were consistent with the research tradition of phenomenology. This tradition was required to understand the experience of teaching teams within the specific culture of the unique case which is the selected school. The collaborative systems studied were specifically related to the culture of the site, so teacher perceptions on the school culture were included in the examination in order to fully understand the experience of teachers. Grade level teaming can be challenging at CHIME, as teachers work closely together and are expected to collaborate extensively to meet the needs of diverse groups of students. To determine connections to the research question, a thorough investigation of all available information was conducted. In studying the phenomenon of debriefing and grade level planning and how were used, the
researcher gathered data by observing and documenting aspects of the collaborative process of daily debriefing and planning sessions and the perceived impact on differentiation. Interviews and observations of all participants were conducted to understand teacher views, actions and opinions.

The intellectual orientation that best represents the perspective for this study is the interpretive paradigm. As a researcher, the aim is to understand, “the complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live it (Schram, 2006). Of particular interest are impressions from interviews and observations of how debriefing and grade level planning meetings impact the development of differentiated curriculum. The researcher learned about the perceived value of the contributions and feedback made within the debriefing sessions and grade level planning meetings, how teams evolve over time, and whether or not these sessions impact planning for differentiation in instruction.

**Sampling Strategy and Process**

Sampling for the study involved two different strategies, one for site selection and another for participant selection. The CHIME Charter School was selected due to the presence of unique school wide systems of daily debriefing and common grade level planning that have been embedded into the structure of each school day and week. These systems, specifically related to the culture of the school, are what Miles and Huberman (1994), refer to as an ”extreme case” or the opportunity to learn from “unusual manifestations or the phenomenon of interest” (p.28). Since CHIME incorporates debriefing and grade level meetings to ultimately impact instruction, a study of those systems made sense. Other schools within the local large urban district, LAUSD, have
not been identified as importing this kind of systematic and routine collaborative model, which makes the study of this site a unique opportunity.

The sampling strategy used to determine participants included a plan for maximum variation which “documents diverse variations and identifies important common patterns” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As the researcher was seeking to understand the point of view and experiences of multiple teachers serving students in different grade levels, variance in frame of reference among grade levels had to be accounted for. The purpose of the research was to understand the elementary school teacher’s perspective and actions on collaboration for differentiation in a span of grade levels. There are noted differences between literacy acquisition and instruction that pertain to planning and differentiation structures among children in primary and upper grades (Henry, 2003). The goals for the sampling process included the provision for variance in the perspective and experience of participants in different roles including general and special education teachers teaching in both primary and upper grades. Additionally, focus on nine different individuals assisted in accounting for variables such as teaching experience both at the selected site and in other schools. This sample was appropriate for this study because the data gathered from teacher interviews and observations has been used to describe and define the perspectives of those individuals participating in the debriefing and grade level planning processes and their perceived outcomes on planning for differentiation.

Rationale for Sample Design

The rationale for the sampling design was to ensure a variety of perspectives and experiences from individuals participating in systematic debriefing protocols on a daily
basis and common grade level planning on a weekly basis. The study of the impact of designated time set aside for debriefing among all classroom staff yielded data on support and connections that ultimately impact instruction of diverse groups of students. The individuals selected, and their own description of the processes related to their roles yielded a variety of perspectives. Interviews and observations provided a richer illustration of actual interactions, relationships, conversation, outcomes, and perceptions.

**Participants**

The sample used for examination of debriefing and grade level planning practices included two separate grade level teams including primary and upper grades. Grade levels identified were first and fourth grades to ensure a span of information relating to students of varied ages and the staff who serve them. Within the purposeful sample of identified staff, are seven general and two special educators who teach in two different grade levels. Both of these teaching teams had a historical background and connection in that they have varied experience in functioning as a team. Both teams had new and veteran members who had and had not worked closely together before. The inclusion of teams that had new and veteran members ensured that examination related to the function of debriefing rather than teacher or team tenure. The fourth grade team was newly formed and at the beginning of development as a collaborative team. The selection was also based on the commitment to examining practices in both primary and upper grades, in addition to the fact that within these grade levels there was a mix of new and veteran teachers who have worked only at CHIME and at other school sites which allowed for data that was related to the specific culture of the school. Individual teacher demographics including role, gender, ethnicity, and experience can be found in Table 1.
Table 1

<table>
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<th>Ethnicity</th>
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<th>Years at CHIME</th>
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<td>First</td>
<td>Sped</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Gen Ed</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Gen Ed</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Gen Ed</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Sped</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subject Protection and Ethical Considerations**

The researcher was concerned with and committed to an ethical study. As succinctly put by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), “As researchers, we are morally bound to conduct our research in a manner that minimizes potential harm to those involved in the study” (p.76). Bloomberg and Volpe discuss clarification of bias and the means for mitigation during study whereby, “participants’ perceptions match up with researcher’s portrayal of them” (2008, p.77). The collection of data regarding perceptions of participants needed to be free from fear of evaluation. Protections and assurances were put in place for all teachers which allowed for participation in the study without the threat of impacted job security. With continual monitoring of subjective perspective through journaling and reflective memos, the researcher worked towards mitigating bias (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

All participants were assured protection during the study in number of ways. The proposal for research was presented to the Institutional Review Board at California State
University, Northridge, reviewed and approved for study. Prior to the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The researcher communicated in writing, that information gained in the study and all data collected during interviews will remain confidential. Member checks engaged participants in review, and allowed for comment and feedback on documentation of interviews and observations. These actions have helped to mitigate some of the ethical concerns that might surround the study. With regard to dependability, the researcher has provided an “audit trail” to prepare for other researchers’ access to data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Finally, to check for consistency, the researcher has provided for inter-rater reliability by providing the opportunity for two CHIME staff members outside of the sample to code two interviews and feedback was used to reduce the potential for bias in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

**Instruments and Procedures**

In this section, the instruments designed for the study and the procedures for the research process are described. The toolkit (See Appendix A) contains information regarding the announcement and information regarding the study of *The Impact of School-Wide Collaboration Systems: Planning for Differentiation*. The documents contained in the appendix were designed to inform and invite participants to join in an examination of this topic. Information regarding expectations and protections were clearly described. The forms and protocols related to each data collection process are included for review of the procedures.

The research was shared at the selected school site through a Research Announcement. This announcement was posted and shared electronically to inform prospective participants as well as the school community about the study. The researcher was also available on site for three weeks to discuss questions or concerns with individuals or groups within the school community. A Research Invitation to describe the study and allow subjects to consider participation was
delivered to each teacher in the identified grade levels. This document also contained information on the principal investigator in the doctoral program in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, in the Eisner College of Education at California State University, Northridge.

To conduct an ethical study and provide clear information, an Informed Consent form was developed to document each subject’s agreement to participate in the study. The form contains information regarding the potential risks and benefits to subjects and disclosure about participant rights during the actual study. This consent form includes information on (1) the purpose of the study, (2) procedures, (3) potential risks and discomforts for subjects, (4) potential benefits for subjects, (5) compensation for participation, (6) confidentiality, (7) participation and withdrawal, (8) identification of investigator, (9) rights of research subjects, and (10) signature of research subjects.

Processes for data collection will be described and data collection instruments are included in the appendix of this chapter.

I. Observation of debriefing sessions and common grade level planning meetings. For this procedure, the form for informed consent was used. Observations consisted of the researcher attending four debriefing sessions within one week and one follow up planning meeting prearranged with each grade level team. Observations lasted the entire length of each debriefing session and grade level planning meeting. All sessions were audio taped with participant permission. The researcher also took field notes during debriefing sessions and planning meetings regarding talk and activity as well as affect and interactions of all participating teachers. Field notes gathered from observations provided data on themes that recurred related to planning for differentiation. These data connected to the interpretive and ethnographical research paradigms. Observation has allowed for data collection on the actual lived experience of teachers as they participated in
the process of debriefing and grade level planning and recorded aspects of the school culture related to this routine and systematic format for collaboration.

II. **Focus Groups**: The teachers for each grade level participated in separate focus groups after observations had taken place. In the focus groups, participants were asked to discuss information related to the observed debriefing sessions and grade level planning meetings. This instrument allowed teachers to share perceptions and experiences regarding the debriefing and planning systems and specific observed sessions in relation to their own experience as a team and to school culture. The focus group session was prearranged for the convenience of the team and lasted approximately 45 minutes. Protocols for the focus group are contained in Appendix E of this document.

III. **Interview**: Each teacher in the sample participated in an individual interview. The interview process was designed to gather data related to the individual’s perceptions and experiences related to debriefing and grade level planning. This instrument facilitated the collection of information related to teacher perceptions of the debriefing and grade level planning processes and the subsequent impact on planning for differentiation. The interviews were prearranged at the convenience of each subject and took approximately 45 minutes. The interview protocols are contained in Appendix D of this chapter.

### Data Collection and Methods

In this section, methods are described for data collection to examine the impact of debriefing and grade level planning meetings on differentiation in instructional planning. Data were collected from observations of four consecutive debriefings, followed by observations of planning sessions for each of the two grade levels. Two focus groups
were conducted with identified grade level team members and individual interviews with each participating teacher provided data.

The sample used for examination of debriefing practices included teachers at the CHIME Charter School in two separate grade level teams including primary and upper elementary grades. Grade levels identified are first and fourth grades to ensure a span of information relating to students of varied ages and the staff who serve them. The two grade levels were studied over a two month period with all data collected from one grade level before moving on to the next. Grade level teams were informed of all processes together, in order to remove any concerns regarding separate study of each grade.

The timeline and data sources used for this study include a focus on each grade level for a one month period:

1. Observations of debriefing sessions: Week One: Four consecutive days (30 minutes each)

2. Focus groups (two total) were conducted afterschool with each of the two grade level teams separately on the Friday following the four observed debriefing sessions. Weeks One and Two: One Day (one hour each)

3. Observation of planning session following debriefings that have been observed.

   Week two: One Day (three hours each)

4. Interviews conducted with each teacher in grades one and four at a prearranged time before or after school. Week Three: (forty five minutes each)

**Observations.** Over the course of the study, observation were be used in two ways. The first included the researcher’s observation of debriefing sessions and grade level planning meetings for each identified grade level. These observations involved the
researcher attending four consecutive sessions during a single week and taking notes regarding information shared on successes and challenges related to the established format for debriefing while audio taping the session. The researcher’s participation and presence were prearranged and consent for participation in observations was obtained. The purpose of this method was to gather data on topics and specific information that were related to the research question including discussion on specific students and assignments related to curricular accommodation and extension. The timeline for this method was two weeks; however the observation of each grade level was separate so that each group can be focused on individually for a week at a time. Observation was again used for each grade level’s planning meeting following the observations of that grade level’s debriefing sets. Based on team structure and teacher input, observations of debriefings and planning sessions were conducted over one week so that current issues in student learning were timely and related. Using this timeline, data was united by time and topic and related to the process of planning for differentiation. These blocks of observation of consecutive debriefings and planning sessions were prearranged with each grade level, and the researcher will took notes throughout.

**Interviews.** The method of interview was used in two ways in this study as a tool for data collection, in the forms of one to one interviews with each participating teacher and in focus groups conducted separately with each identified grade level team. Interview and focus group protocols were developed and informed by the review of literature. Focus groups were planned and designed to follow observations of grade level debriefings and planning meetings. Individual interviews were conducted at prearranged times during the week observations took place. Collected data from focus groups were
linked to the team’s reflections on the week’s debriefing and planning meetings and the perceived impacts on planning for differentiation. Additionally, guided by literature, some focus group questions were designed to gather data on group reflection concerning the impact of the processes of debriefing and grade level planning meetings. Focus group and interview protocols are included in the appendix of this chapter.

Semi-structured interviews with each participating teacher were conducted using a protocol designed to gather data regarding the perceived experience of debriefing and grade level planning meetings and the perception of the general impact on planning for differentiation. These interviews were prearranged with obtained consent, and conducted in an individual one to one format with the researcher acting as interviewer. As each grade was studied separately, each member of one team was interviewed during the week devoted to the study of that group. Interviews lasted from forty five to seventy five minutes and were audio taped with participant permission. Focus group sessions lasted from forty five to sixty minutes and were also audiotaped with participant permission. Interviews were then transcribed and are held by the researcher.

**Purpose of the Methods**

A qualitative approach was used to gather data to examine research questions. The intellectual orientation that best represents this perspective is the Interpretive Paradigm. The aim is to understand, “the complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live it” (Schram, 2006). As the researcher sought to understand the experiences of multiple teachers, and grade level teams, interview and observation processes allowed for understanding those varied perspectives.
Inquiry into teacher perceptions regarding the impact of debriefing and common grade level planning to support systematic collaboration in schools is a good match for this paradigm because of the nature of collaboration and the desire to know what the experience is really like or how things are and how they are understood. In connecting with this paradigm, the researcher was steering towards an opportunity to understand a variety of perspectives through the interview process in both individual and focus group formats. The research tradition that was a match for the inquiry is a case study approach using phenomenology. The combination of these traditions was required in order to understand the lived experience of teaching teams within the specific culture of the unique case which is the selected school. Since collaborative systems are specifically related to the culture of the site that is studied, the culture of that site was studied as well. Additionally, a goal was to present an interpretation of the perception of different individual’s experience within the phenomenon of this process. The use of observations in two contexts provided for gathering information from individuals on their perception of the process. By gathering information from grade level teams as a unit, the researcher was better able to understand the experience and the perceptions of each team as a whole.

Data Analysis

The following section describes the methods for data analysis to examine the impact of daily debriefing and weekly common grade level planning meetings on differentiated instructional planning. The analytical techniques used in this qualitative study included preliminary and thematic data analysis followed by interpretation of data. Preliminary data analysis began as data were collected, and were ongoing throughout the collection process. In this phase, code lists were formulated, concepts were identified and
emerging issues were summarized (Grbich, 2007). Thematic data analysis began after all data were collected and preliminary analysis has been completed. During this process, segmented data was categorized under the heading of each tool and linked to identify emerging themes (Grbich, 2007). The thematic analysis process also included recontextualization where data was analyzed for commonalities, differences and patterns (Coffey & Atkinson, 1999). The final step in data analysis was the process of interpretation in which codes and categories were developed for pattern description so that conclusions can be drawn. The outcome of this aspect of data analysis was the transformation from coded into meaningful data in order to theorize ideas and formulate conclusions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1999). Data sources and analysis procedures used for this study are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source in Temporal order</th>
<th>Data Analysis Process Preliminary</th>
<th>Data Analysis Process Thematic</th>
<th>Data Analysis Process Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observations of debriefing sessions</td>
<td>Write field notes during data collection. Document initial impressions. Identify needed follow-up and contextual links.</td>
<td>Field Notes: Transcription, correction, extended, coding and memos.</td>
<td>Analysis of how codes and emerging themes related to ideas, research questions and literature. Description of patterns and relationships. Formulate conclusions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation of planning session following debriefings that have been observed</td>
<td>Write field notes during data collection. Review and document initial impressions. Determine contextual links.</td>
<td>Field Notes: Transcribed, corrected, extended, coded, segmented, categorized, and memos</td>
<td>Analysis of how codes and emerging themes related to ideas, research questions and literature. Description of patterns and relationships. Formulate conclusions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups conducted with each grade level teams at different times</td>
<td>Record session, field notes. Identify needed follow-up. Determine contextual links.</td>
<td>Transcription, coding, segmentation, categorizing and memos</td>
<td>Analysis of how codes related to ideas and emerging themes, research questions and literature. Describe patterns and relationships. Formulate conclusions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews conducted with each teacher in grades one and five</td>
<td>Record session, field notes, identify follow-up. Determine contextual links.</td>
<td>Transcription, coding, segmentation, categorizing and memos</td>
<td>Analysis of how codes related to ideas and emerging themes, research questions and literature. Describe patterns and relationships. Formulate conclusions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Analysis of Observations.** Over the course of this study, observations were used in two ways. Data from observations were analyzed through a study of field notes. Field notes were decontextualized, sorted and separated from the context in order to be coded (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data was then reviewed to outline insights and ideas as well as to determine needed follow up. In thematic analysis, data was recontextualized and segmented and categorized to link emerging themes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In recontextualizing, connections to developed codes were examined. The first set, included the researcher’s observation of debriefing sessions for each identified grade level. These observations involved the researcher attending and audio taping four consecutive sessions during a single week, and gathering field notes regarding information shared on successes and challenges related to the established format for debriefing. Data was collected in the form of field notes to document situation, interaction and communication. Immediately following the observation, the researcher reviewed the field notes and added impressions. Audio tapes were transcribed by the researcher for segmentation and examination of emerging themes. Transcribed data was coded sorted and stored using ATLAS ti software which is designed for qualitative analysis. ATLAS ti software is designed for storage, categorization and retrieval of data which allows the researcher electronic access for distillation, comparison and drawing conclusions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Finally using an interrogation methods process, patterns were described and conclusions were formulated about themes that emerge (Grbich, 2007).

Observation was again used in each grade level’s planning session during the week of observations of that grade level’s four debriefing sessions. Observation of each grade level’s planning session was conducted during the week that debriefing were
observed to provide connections to student learning and topics. Using this timeline, data were united by time and topic and related to the process of planning for differentiation. Analysis of data collected during planning was conducted using the same methods outlined for the debriefing session.

**Interviews**

The analysis of interviews examined two types of data that will be collected. The first were focus groups conducted with each of the two identified grade level teams. The second consisted of one to one interviews with each teacher participating in the study. Interview and focus group protocols were developed and informed by the review of literature. All interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed by the researcher. Data collected in the form of field notes that documented situation, interaction and communication were reviewed using memos. Immediately following each interview, the researcher reviewed collected field notes and added impressions. Raw data was transcribed by the researcher for segmentation and examination of emerging themes. Transcribed data was coded and sorted using ATLAS ti software, designed for storage categorization, and retrieval which allows the researcher to compare and analyze data for qualitative analysis. Finally using an interrogation methods process, patterns were described and explored and conclusions formulated regarding themes that emerged (Grbich, 2007).

**Purpose of the Methods of Analysis**

A qualitative approach to data analysis was used to examine the research questions. The intellectual orientation that best represents this perspective is the Interpretive Paradigm. For the researcher, the aim was to understand, “the complex and
constructed reality from the point of view of those who live it” (Schram, 2006). As the researcher worked to understand the experiences of multiple teachers, transcription and coding processes provided information on those varied perspectives. The interrogation of coded data allowed the researcher to “systematically explore and generate meaning” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1999, p. 46).

Inquiry into this phenomenon, including teacher perceptions and school culture regarding the impact of routine collaboration embedded in schools, was a good match for this paradigm. The nature of collaboration and the desire to understand what the experience of collaboration from different perspectives is like is interpretable. In connecting with this paradigm, the researcher had the opportunity to document and review a variety of perspectives through the interview process in both individual and focus group formats. For the research design, a case study format was used with the research tradition of phenomenology to promote thorough case evaluation. The rationale for this approach was to ensure accurate coverage of the specific case while examining the experience of those who were faculty working at the focus site. Since collaborative systems are a specific to the culture site, the goal is to analyze information obtained from subjects and the environment.

**Role of the Researcher**

The examination of the perceived effects of daily debriefing and grade level planning meetings on differentiation of instruction in a school was a result of the researcher’s own experiences with the need for fostering collaboration among grade level teams in order to share expertise, as a teacher and administrator. In this section the role of the researcher will be described including a discussion of ethical procedures. In planning
a study at the site where the researcher had a history as a past the school leader, clear plans had to be developed for mitigating researcher bias and the effect of the researcher on the study. In designing the study, the researcher reflected on the collaboration systems that are specifically embedded in the identified site. As the principal investigator, the researcher had the opportunity to closely examine the perceptions the teachers in two grade level teams serving diverse populations of primary and upper grade students. This opportunity brought a variety of challenges with it including an evaluation and subsequent close monitoring of subjectivity in conducting research a site where the researcher worked in the past.

In evaluating the challenges of conducting research at this site, there are a number of obstacles to consider and address. Primarily, as the former school leader, the researcher had to work hard to address subjectivity as well as presence as the primary investigator to ensure that data collected through interview, observation and document review was accurate and free from bias. There is also the concern that the teachers within the study will want to please and feel pressure to give ‘desired’ answers. This was addressed by providing a clear description of the role of researcher and by sharing a thorough disclosure regarding the commitment to better understanding the process and learning from others their perception of its value and effects. In order to obtain a clear picture of the phenomenon of debriefing, data was triangulated in order to use “multiple perspectives to clarify meaning” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p.72).

The researcher had to consider the possible effects of herself as on the case, or what Miles and Huberman, refer to as the researcher disrupting “the ongoing social and institutional relationships” (1994 p.265). Clarity with study subjects regarding the ways
that the researcher was subjectively involved and how she addressed bias provided assurance. Attendance in debriefing sessions for the identified grade levels will have to be approached carefully with purpose and assurances outlined. The researcher met with both teams to clearly explain the purpose of the research and answer questions of participants. In order to check for bias and accuracy, member checks with subjects were conducted as data was reviewed and analyzed. Finally, the researcher sought peer review from a school administrator to ensure that bias is controlled for as much as possible.

During observations and interviews, the researcher had to be cognizant of the fact that conducting the study was likely to affect her. In identifying these effects there were areas that needed to be monitored. The researcher had to work to be an accurate recorder in all sessions. The second impact of subjectivity was the researcher’s past involvement in the development of the current system of the round table format and sharing successes and challenges. In seeking information on the effects of and how to improve the process, the researcher had to remove any investment in the debriefing process out of evaluation of the data and fully occupy the role of researcher. Allowing research subjects and a school administrator to review and provide feedback on data from observations and transcription for interviews supported the mitigation of researcher impact.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of daily debriefing and common grade level collaborative planning meetings on preparation for differentiated instruction. The study was conducted at the CHIME Charter School at two grade levels with a total of nine teachers: first grade, four general education teachers and one special education teacher and fourth grade, three general education teachers and one special education teacher. Data were collected from (1) observations of four consecutive debriefings, (2) observations of planning sessions for each of the two grade levels, (3) two focus groups with identified grade level team members and (4) individual interviews with each participating teacher. Protocols were developed for individual interviews and for focus groups containing thirteen and eleven questions respectively. In this chapter findings will be described from the observations and interviews to address the following five research questions:

1. What information is brought to the debriefing sessions?

2. How does debriefing inform grade level planning?

3. How do teachers perceive the impact of daily debriefing on planning for students with varied abilities?

4. How do teachers perceive the impact of weekly common grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiation of instruction?

5. How do teachers perceive the impact of school-wide daily debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on themselves as reflective practitioners?
Organization of Data Analysis

Data from the interviews and observations were organized according to each of the five research questions. Table 3 lists the contributions of the instruments to each research question, indicating that interview and observation data addressed research questions 1-4 and interview data addressed research question 5.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Teacher Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What information is brought to the debriefing sessions?</td>
<td>Questions 1,2,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How does debriefing inform grade level planning?</td>
<td>Questions 4,5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How do teachers perceive the impact of weekly common grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiation of instruction?</td>
<td>Questions 6,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How do teachers perceive the impact of daily debriefing on planning for students with varied abilities?</td>
<td>Questions 9,12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How do teachers perceive the impact of school-wide daily debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on themselves as reflective practitioners?</td>
<td>Questions 8,10,11,13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analytical techniques used in this qualitative study included preliminary and thematic data analysis followed by interpretation of data. Preliminary data analysis began as data were collected, and were ongoing throughout the collection process. In this phase, code lists were formulated, concepts were identified and emerging issues were summarized (Grbich, 2007). Thematic data analysis was initiated after all data were collected and preliminary analysis has been completed. During this process, segmented data was categorized under the heading of each tool and linked to identify emerging themes (Grbich, 2007). The thematic analysis process also included recontextualization where data was analyzed for commonalities, differences and patterns (Coffey & Atkinson, 1999). The final step in data analysis was the process of interpretation in which codes and categories were developed for pattern description so that conclusions can be drawn. The outcome of this aspect of data analysis was the transformation from coded into meaningful data in order to theorize ideas and formulate conclusions related to the research questions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1999).

Findings are presented for synthesis according to the research questions and the themes that emerged related to data collected from each research instrument including: 1) observations from four debriefing sessions for each grade level 2) observation of one planning session for each grade level, 3) individual interviews with each of the nine teachers from grades one and four participating in the study, and 4) focus group interviews with each of the two grade level teams. This chapter is organized by descriptions of findings related to research questions that apply to each of the two collaborative structures examined, debriefing and collaborative grade level planning.
Information Shared in Debriefing

**Research Question #1: What information is brought to the debriefing sessions?**

As shown in Table 4, data collected on debriefing sessions was obtained through individual interviews, focus groups and observation of four consecutive sessions for each of the two grade levels. Themes that emerged through teacher interviews and observations are shown in Tables 5-7 and described below.

**Table 4**

**Research Question 1 by Data Collected From Each Instrument**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Teacher Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Group Interviews with each Grade Level Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debriefing Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What information is brought to the debriefing sessions?</td>
<td>Questions 1, 2, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions 1, 2, 3, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 sessions at each grade level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher Interviews**

Questions 1-3 from teacher interviews (see Appendix D) related to the first research question. Themes that emerged for question 1, the purpose of debriefing, were *sharing information*, and *learning from and supporting each other*. As shown in Table 5, these three themes occurred at both grade levels (80%-100% in grade 1 and 75%-100% in grade 4).
### Table 5

*Themes from Interview Questions 1, 2 & 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Q1: Purpose of Debriefing</th>
<th>Q2: Format of Debriefing</th>
<th>Q3: Types of Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
<td>Share Learn Support</td>
<td>Routine Norms Learn by Doing</td>
<td>Behavior Adapt Student Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>80% 100% 80%</td>
<td>60% 100% 60%</td>
<td>100% 100% 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>100% 100% 100%</td>
<td>100% 75% 75%</td>
<td>100% 100% 75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90% 100% 90%</td>
<td>80% 88% 68%</td>
<td>100% 100% 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From responses to the second question, describing the format of debriefing, themes that emerged were *routine, norms, and learning by doing*. When describing the process, teachers shared that debriefing was routine and accepted as part of their workday. They also discussed expected norms as shared by all team members including being on time for sessions, following the format of sharing successes and challenges and using time efficiently. Teachers also shared that the best way to learn the process was by doing it. As in question 1, these three themes appeared at both grade levels (60%-100% in grade 1 and 75%-100% in grade 4).

Finally, when prompted by the third question about the *types of information gathered in debriefing logs*, it was determined that logs were inconsistently used by one of the grade level teams and would not be used for data collection. However, in individual interviews, prompted by question 3, teachers shared topics that each felt would be recorded in logs had that documentation been used consistently and data provided
orally by subjects was used for this portion of the analysis. Themes that emerged were 
student behavior, the need for more curricular adaptations for individual students, and
student engagement. As in the other questions, each theme emerged in both grade 1
(60%-100%) and grade 4 (75%-100%).

Focus Group Interviews

Questions 1-3 from the focus group interviews (see Appendix E) contributed to
the first interview question on debriefing sessions. These questions asked about the
topics and curricular themes of the week’s debriefing and whether they were typical of
debriefing sessions. As shown in Table 6, themes that emerged were behavior and
adaptations, the curricular themes of writing, reading and math, and differentiation
regarding modifications, accommodations, and extensions. Each theme emerged in grade
1 (40%-100%) and grade 4 (75%-100%).

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Q1: Repeated Topics</th>
<th>Q2: Repeated Curricular Themes</th>
<th>Q3: Differentiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As illustrated in Table 6 in focus groups, teachers again described behavior (90%) and curricular adaptations (100%) as the most common topics. When asked in focus groups about repeated curricular themes, the most common responses by teachers in both grade level teams were writing (89%), reading (78%) and math (89%). When asked focus group question #3 ‘How are any of the successes and challenges that were shared in debriefing during the past four days related to curricular differentiation?’, the most common responses were curricular modifications (100%), curricular extension (89%), and curricular accommodations (56%). The findings from data collected in focus groups indicate inconsistencies between grade levels. While aggregated data across both teams shows curricular accommodations to be the least mentioned topic by teachers, there was a difference between the perceptions of teachers in the two grade levels. More teachers in the fourth grade team mentioned curricular accommodations (75%) than teachers in the first grade team (40%). This could be related to defining curricular needs for students as they grow older and content becomes more complex.

Data from focus groups provided specific examples of repeated topics that teachers described in more depth. In the first grade team the theme of written language emerged several times in debriefing during the week of observations. As one teacher put it, “I know we talked about writing a lot because we are running those new writing strategies”. In the fourth grade debriefing sessions the topic of science was mentioned in relation to both successes and challenges by three team members in each of the four days observed. In the fourth grade focus group, when teachers reflected on topics that came to the surface in debriefing that week there was agreement that math was continually referred to because the team had specifically planned to tie math and science together for
the coming weeks. Teachers noted that this was a challenging instructional strategy, but one that they agreed would expand meaning for students across both subjects.

In further examining the issue of what information is brought to debriefing sessions, teachers noted that they discuss commonalities across classrooms in each of the grade levels during focus group sessions. In this excerpt from the first grade focus group teachers commented:

*Teacher 1:* You know, I notice for all of us, the students are doing really well academically and I feel great about what they are learning. I mean, how they are in first grade and the majority of them can read. It’s so amazing. At the same time behaviorally they are getting pretty loose.

*Teacher 2:* I’ve seen it across all the classrooms. They are feeling their oats and I don’t have a problem with that, but it’s getting noisy.

*Teacher 3:* They need some more instruction about expectations and since this is the case across all four classes, we should figure out something to reinforce expectations across the grade level. These little ones are growing up.

This exchange illustrates that the information brought to debriefing sessions can be common in classrooms across a grade level. A fourth grade teachers shared, “It’s a pretty good indicator that if we all struggled with something, a lesson, materials, sequence, it really comes out in collab (code for debriefing). If we’re hearing the same thing from each other over and over and it’s not a ‘success’ we know immediately that there is a problem.”
Observations

Data from observation of debriefing sessions was consistent with data from focus groups and interviews. Repeated topics from observed debriefing sessions are illustrated in Table 7 representing the number of times and types of differentiation that was mentioned by teachers in each session including curricular extension, accommodation and modification.

Table 7

<p>| Observed References to Curriculum Differentiation in Debriefing |
|-------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|---------------|------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 1 Observed</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade 4 Observed</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extension</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Using field notes and transcripts from observed debriefing sessions, themes emerged regarding references to curricular modifications, accommodations and extensions. Table 7 shows the distribution of references to each of the three topics over the four days that debriefing was observed in each grade level. Each of the topics was not mentioned every day, but all three were mentioned at different times throughout the week. Comparisons across the two grade levels show relatively equal distribution with the exception of more references to curricular modifications (43%) by the first grade team and reference to curricular accommodations (39%) more often in the fourth grade team sessions. This information however, does not take into account the numbers and learning needs of students enrolled in each grade level.

Summary

In summary, findings on information brought to debriefing sessions indicate relationships to differentiation from teacher interviews and observations. The larger themes of student behavior, student engagement and adaptations, when examined closely, yielded subthemes that showed teachers engaged in specific topics related to differentiation while debriefing. The strongest relationships, triangulated through analysis of interviews, focus groups and observations were shown for curricular modifications, extension and accommodations. Additionally during the course of observations and in interviews and focus groups, the content subjects of reading, written language and math were discussed.
Informing Grade Level Planning

Research Question #2: How does debriefing impact and inform grade level planning?

As shown in Table 8, data collected on how debriefing informed grade level planning was obtained through teacher individual interviews (questions 4-6), focus groups interviews (questions 4, 6), observations of four consecutive debriefing sessions and one planning session for each of the two grade levels. Themes that emerged through teacher interviews and observations are shown in Tables 9-11 and described below.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 2</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Teacher Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does debriefing inform grade level planning?</td>
<td>Questions 4,5,6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Interviews

As shown in Table 9, Questions 4 and 5 from the teacher interviews (see Appendix D) related to the second research question. Themes that emerged for question 4, regarding the impact of debriefing on planning sessions, were; clearing the way, information regarding common lessons across classrooms and pacing. Teachers shared that debriefing ‘clears the way’, or sets the stage for planning and provides for more
expedient use of planning time. One teacher noted “It clears the way, so we already know how the week has gone and don’t have to go there with our planning time. We can get right down to it”. According to teacher responses access to information on how common lessons went in different classrooms guided the team in considering all students as they developed subsequent lessons and teachers responded that they learned from each other regarding the pacing of lessons in their team member’s classrooms. As shown in Table 9, both of these themes occurred at both grade levels (75%-100% in grade 1 and 60%-100% in grade 4).

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Q4: Impact on planning sessions</th>
<th>Q5: Curricular Extension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear the Way</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Lessons</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacing</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear the Way</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Lessons</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacing</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear the Way</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Lessons</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacing</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes that emerged on curricular extension, shown in Table 9, included information on individual students, student engagement and extension ideas from peers. Teachers described feedback they gained from debriefing about individual students who finished work quickly or who seemed to be unchallenged by content. Input from paraprofessionals and other classroom adults provided feedback on student engagement.
in large and small group activities. Lastly, teachers described that by hearing their colleagues talk about student engagement gave them ideas for curricular extension. These three themes appeared at both grade levels (60%-100% in grade 1 and 75%-100% in grade 4).

Focus Group Interviews

Questions 4 & 6 from focus group interviews (see Appendix E) contributed to data for research question 2. Table 10 shows the themes that emerged from each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Q4: Information/ Current Sessions</th>
<th>Q6: Use of Debriefing Info</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 4 asked about the topics and curricular themes of the week’s debriefing and whether they were typical of regular debriefing sessions. As shown in Table 10, the themes that emerged included language arts, math and student engagement. These three themes emerged in both grade levels (60-100% in grade 1 and 75-100% in grade 4). In focus groups, teachers discussed basic skills in math and language arts related to student engagement. One teacher commented, “When math and reading are areas of need for a
student, it comes up over and over again.” Another shared, “We talk about basic skills a lot in debriefing and have that in mind for kids who are not there affects our planning”.

Prompted by Question 6, ways that teachers use information from debriefing sessions in grade level planning meetings, themes that emerged were common lessons, information on differentiation and student engagement. As shown in Table 10 these themes emerged across both of the grade levels (80-100% in grade one and 75-100% in grade 4).

In each grade level focus group, teachers reported that through debriefing they have a larger sample to learn from in determining how common lessons went across their grade level. The theme of common lessons related to the need for differentiation and student engagement as well. For example in discussing plans for sequencing math skills, one teacher noted, “Thursday’s lesson bombed according to all of you, so we better reteach it in a better way”. Another teacher described a language arts lesson that did not go well in her class after hearing two colleagues share that particular lesson as a success for the day. In further discussion, student engagement came to the surface as issues for the teacher who felt that day’s lesson was unsuccessful. She shared, “I talked too much and too long. I lost them”.

Observations

Data from debriefing and planning session observations were examined to determine connections between debriefing and planning sessions. Findings from data gathered during observations of both debriefing and grade level planning sessions yielded
two ‘cases’, one in each grade level, where the impact of debriefing on grade level planning sessions was observed. These findings also illustrate connections from both collaboration structures across the spectrum of differentiation including one instance of curricular modification and one instance of curricular extension.

**First grade observation: Connecting debriefing to grade level planning.** During the week that first grade debriefing meetings were observed, one first grade student’s behavior was described as ‘challenging” by a teacher (day 1). Further in the week, the same student’s behavior was described as “hard to manage” by one paraprofessional (day 3). As the team discussed the student in debriefing (day 3), it was noted that behaviors were consistently more challenging during writing activities. In the subsequent planning session that week the team was discussing writing activities and preparation of materials for students with individualized learning needs. During this part of the planning meeting the classroom teacher reminded herself and the group, “we need sentence starters for Wyatt because we all struggled with him during writing this week”.

This case illustrates the use of information from both a teacher and a paraprofessional in a debriefing session that stimulated a discussion that led the team to interpretation of behavior (acting out during writing activities). In the subsequent planning meeting, the team made connections from student behavior and approached the issue from a curricular perspective using information gained in the debriefing session to prepare differentiated curriculum.
Fourth grade observation: Connecting debriefing to grade level planning. In the fourth grade team debriefing sessions, two teachers in one session talked about pacing for two students who were finishing work on science assignments much more quickly than their peers. One teacher described the students’ reading skills, by saying “they are off the charts, smart” (day 2). A paraprofessional described one of the students as “looking for something else to do when they finished with the assigned work” (day 2). Teachers brought up these students in the subsequent planning meeting while discussing science activities and reminded each other that they needed to plan for complexity to engage those students who were high achieving and required curricular extension. One teacher commented during the fourth grade planning meeting, “These guys are going to challenge our enrichment abilities all year long.”

This example shows a connection between debriefing and common grade level planning in the area of curricular extension. In the focus group teachers noted that while they perceived the references as subtle, the need for differentiation was present and required attention. Teachers in this instance used information obtained in debriefing to remind and determine a need for differentiation for students who were high achieving.

Summary

In summary, data from the interviews and observations were consistent across grade levels, indicating a number of ways in which debriefing informs and impacts grade level planning. Referenced by teachers in both grade levels was the idea that time spent in debriefing led to more expedient planning by coming to meetings with what was learned...
in debriefing during the week. In examining connections between debriefing and grade level planning, themes emerged on differentiation in language arts, math and student engagement for students who needed curricular extension or accommodation. The data also indicate that having the opportunity to be engaged in lesson reflection and outcomes in classrooms across a grade level provided a broader perspective for teachers to consider as they planned together. Taken together, the findings suggest that debriefing was a useful structure in preparation for planning. According to one fourth grade team member, “From what we learn…we can change instruction the following day and also make much better plans than we could if we were doing this alone.”

**Impact of Grade Level Planning on Differentiation**

**Research Question #3: How do teachers perceive the impact of weekly common grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiation of instruction?**

As shown in Table 11, data collected on the impact of grade level planning sessions on differentiation were obtained through individual interviews, focus groups and observations of planning meetings. Themes that emerged through teacher interviews and observations are shown in Tables 12-14 and described below.

**Interviews**

Questions 6 and 7 from teacher interviews (see Appendix D) related to the impact of grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiation. Themes that emerged from question 6 on information gained during debriefing on the need for curricular adjustments were *students with disabilities, behavior plans and ideas from peers.*
Table 11

*Research Question 3 by Data Collected From Each Instrument*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 3</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do teachers perceive the impact of weekly common grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiation of instruction?</td>
<td>Individual Teacher Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions 6, 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes that emerged from question 7 regarding curricular topics that translated from debriefing to planning were *adaptations for reading, adaptations for math* the opportunity for *immediate adjustment* of curriculum. Table 12 shows the themes that emerged from teacher responses to interview questions. These three themes occurred at both grade levels (80%-100% in grade 1 and 75%-100% in grade 4).

Teachers described information gained on students with disabilities from their debriefing team as impacting planning. Teachers used information on student behavior to focus on the need for curricular accommodations and modifications and teachers shared that they considered the development of individualized behavior plans as a curricular modification. As one teacher noted, “When there are a lot of challenges about behavior in the classroom, we know the first thing we need to look at is what and how we are asking students to learn.” Finally, teachers shared that in debriefing they added to their skill set
for curricular adjustment by listening to their colleagues share in debriefing.

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Q6: Debriefing and Accommodation and Modifications</th>
<th>Q7: Curricular Topics from Debriefing to Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>Behavior Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 n=5</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 n=4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n=9</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes from Question 7 in the interview protocol regarding connections from debriefing to planning were *adaptations for reading, adaptations for math* and the opportunity for *immediate adjustment* of instruction. Teachers shared that in debriefing the need for differentiation of basic skills in math and reading related to the successes and challenges shared by teachers and paraprofessionals. Directly related to the need to address basic skills in reading and math was the theme of immediate adjustment of curriculum based on information gained in debriefing. One teacher shared, “If I know what I’m asking a student to read is too hard or too easy and it comes up a couple of times, I’ve got to do something the next day. I don’t wait for the planning meeting to do something, but you can bet it will come up in the next planning meeting.” These three themes emerged across both grade levels, grade 1 (60-80%) and grade 4 (75-100%)
Focus Group Interviews

Question 3 from focus group interviews (see Appendix E) contributed to the findings for the impact of common grade level planning on preparation for differentiation. Table 13 shows themes from teacher responses in focus groups. This question asked teachers how successes and challenges shared in debriefing related to planning for differentiation. The most common connections from debriefing to the need for differentiation were resulted in the themes of student engagement in activities and student behavior. Teachers believed student response to activities and instruction related to the need for curricular adjustment. Each theme emerged in grade 1 (80-100%) and grade 4 (100%).

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Q3: Successes and Challenges Related to Differentiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations

Observations of planning meetings contributed to information on the impact of planning meeting for differentiation of instruction. Themes that emerged from the data related to accommodations and modifications, as shown in Table 14. Teachers referred to
accommodations and modifications for individual students and for small groups of students within the grade level including students with learning disabilities and who were English language learners. Findings indicate that reference to accommodations occurred more often than references to modifications which may represent grade level demographics of more students with mild to moderate learning needs versus those students with moderate to severe learning needs. The themes, accommodations and modifications, were present in data from observations across both grade levels in grade 1 (35-63%) in grade 1 and in grade 4 (47-53%).

Table 14

Observation of Planning Meetings

References to Accommodations and Modifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Written Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Written Language</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While in planning meetings, teachers did not reference debriefing meetings; however discussion of curricular adaptations was ongoing. Data from observation of grade level planning meetings indicated that when teachers were discussing
accommodations, they appeared to target a group of students across the grade level.

Discussions around modifications appeared to be targeted towards individual students across each grade level. Modifications were noted when teachers changed the expectation for the content standard discussed related to the needs of individual students as named by teachers in the meeting. For example during a planning discussion for reading, teachers talked about modifications for three students in the grade level who required pictures paired with print per IEP goals:

Teacher 1: *We need to pick the words for pictures and this is a hard because so few of them are concrete.*

Teacher 2: *Sebastian is ready to pair pictures with the words and match the words so that’s another set.*

Teacher 3 (General educator) *I’m prepping this, I can do it. We’ll probably reuse them when Quentin and Jackson are ready for this.*

This observation illustrates the discussion and accountability that is ongoing within grade level planning sessions. Teachers used input from each other to guide the planning for differentiation. In addition, this interaction illustrates the shared responsibility in preparation of differentiated materials across the grade level.

**Summary**

In summary, findings on the impact of grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiated instruction indicate a relationship between planning meetings and differentiation. Analysis of data from interviews and focus groups questions suggest that planning for differentiation is beneficial for the spectrum of student learning needs from curricular extension to modification. Themes from interview questions
related to planning meetings were accountability, shared responsibility and access to expertise of special and general educators emerged. Other themes connecting preparation for differentiated instruction to planning meetings included connections teachers made between student behavior and curricular needs as well as a focus on basic skills in reading and math. The strongest relationship of themes, triangulated through analysis of interviews, focus groups and observations, were in the areas of curricular adaptations and access to shared expertise.

**Debriefing and Students of Varied Abilities**

*Research Question #4: How do teachers perceive the impact of daily debriefing on planning for students with varied abilities?*

Table 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 4</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How do teachers perceive the impact of daily debriefing on planning for students with varied abilities? | Individual Teacher Interviews  
Focus Group Interviews with each Grade Level Team  
Debriefing Observation  
Planning Observation |
| Questions 9,12                                                                      | Questions 8,10,11                                |
| 4 sessions at each grade level                                                    | 1 planning session at each grade level            |

As shown in Table 15, data collected on the impact of debriefing sessions on differentiation were obtained through individual interviews, focus groups and observations of planning meetings. Themes that emerged through teacher interviews and
observations are shown in Tables 16-18 and described below.

**Interviews**

Questions 9 and 12 from the teacher interviews (see Appendix D) related to the fourth research question on the impact of daily debriefing on planning for students with varied abilities. Table 16 shows the themes that emerged from teacher responses to interview questions. First, teachers were asked to describe the planning process in isolation from debriefing. Themes that emerged for question 9, were, *shared time, shared responsibility and shared materials preparation*. These themes related to a sense of accountability on the part of teachers in a commitment to time together and to sharing responsibility for all students across the grade level and preparation of materials for all students in the grade level.

Table 16

*Teacher Interview Questions 9 & 12*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Q9: Describe the Planning Process</th>
<th>Q12: Insights on the Need for Differentiation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Common Time</td>
<td>Shared Responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 n=5</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 n=4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n=9</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Common to both grade levels examined, teachers described the time set aside by school policy and the embedded routine of weekly grade level meetings as a component to the structure of grade level planning. Additionally themes emerged around joint responsibility and shared accountability among all teachers for the entire grade level. Part of the planning process is a format where each team member on a rotating bi-monthly basis holds the responsibility for one curricular domain for the entire grade level. Teachers responded that this allowed them to focus on and develop expertise in the content standards and related instruction for curricular domains over the school year. Structure for dividing materials preparation responsibilities was according to assigned curricular topic. For example, one teacher was responsible for preparation of all materials related to reading, one for written language, and one for math. Depending on the team size, preparation for arts and sciences were divided accordingly. As shown in Table 16, these three themes occurred at both grade levels (80%-100% in grade 1 and 100% in grade 4).

From responses to Question 12, describing the format of debriefing, themes that emerged were information from paraprofessionals, ongoing review of IEP goals and access to varied strategies. These findings related to the process and format of debriefing as well as information shared in the sessions that connect back to planning meetings are described below. The three themes that emerged are shown in Table 16 and appeared in both grade levels; grade 1 (80-100%) and grade 4 (100%).

In interviews, all teachers shared that connections with paraprofessionals from the debriefing process provided insight to the need for differentiation for individual students.
Teachers saw aspects of structured collaboration with paraprofessionals as beneficial to themselves for gathering information about students and to access paraprofessional expertise and experience. Teachers described hearing paraprofessional feedback in the following ways, “I learn about what’s working up close, you know…when the para (sic) is working one to one with a student over a period of time they know them”. Teachers also shared that paraprofessional input is used to generate ideas for student engagement in lessons and practice. A first grade teacher shared, “I wasn’t getting anywhere with Adam and sentence writing until he (the paraprofessional) suggested that we use a white (dry erase) board. That changed everything.”

Data from interviews also highlighted the value of paraprofessional insight for students requiring curricular extension. Teachers shared that paraprofessionals provide unique insight into students who, 1) “finish quickly and are happy to sit quietly” and 2) “students who seem bored or even act out because they are not engaged in work that’s too easy for them”. Teachers who mentioned value for paraprofessional insight for students needing deeper and more complex curriculum noted the partnership they felt in discussing paraprofessional observations with them. One teacher noted, “I really value the extra eyes and perspective. I’m not saying that they know when a student is gifted, but they do know when someone is bored or already knows the content.”

The theme of ongoing review of IEP goals is related to the format of debriefing that is school-wide. During debriefing sessions, all teachers and paraprofessionals record anecdotal information for students with disabilities that they have worked with or observed on that particular day. These observations are related to IEP goals and notes are
recorded on prepared data collection sheets. Notebooks containing these sheets are stored in binders in the classroom designated for debriefing. Teachers were unanimous in their perceptions that reflection on IEP goals during debriefing reminded them of individual student learning needs and that this constant orientation was useful in planning for differentiation. As one teacher candidly put it, “In my other schools, I would read goals mostly in preparation for IEP meetings and during report card time. It’s much more important to think about goals in relation to what the student needs to learn rather than just thinking back to what they have learned.”

The final theme that emerged from teacher perceptions on the impact of debriefing on planning for student with varied abilities was access to varied strategies. Teachers shared that it is during debriefing when they hear their colleagues reflect on successes and challenges; they hear varied strategies and approaches for differentiation and individualization for instruction. A teacher described the ways this related to differentiation in the following way. “It’s the ends of the learning spectrum that were harder for me at first. I was stumped by how to bring depth and complexity to kids who needed it and modifications for students who had very severe disabilities was even harder. Over the years in debriefing, I’ve had a chance to listen to example after example of what worked for my colleagues and what didn’t”.

Focus Groups

Questions 8, 10, and 11 from focus group interviews (see Appendix E) contributed to the findings for the impact of common grade level planning on preparation for differentiation. Table 17 shows themes from teacher responses to all three questions in focus groups.
The themes from Question 8 regarding the purpose of planning were, *sharing expertise, accountability, and equity across grade levels*. Teacher indicated that in planning sessions they have access to the experience and knowledge of colleagues and that within the planning process they are accountable to each other and to students to plan for the best instruction available by using the group as a resource. Teachers also responded that there was accountability within the teams for arriving to planning meetings on time and following through with agreed upon actions and preparation of materials. Lastly, the theme equity across the grade level indicated teachers’ perceptions that no single classroom in their grade level had different or better planning than any other and that all students in the grade benefited from their collaboration. These themes were present in both grade levels; grade 1 (80-100%) and grade 4 (75-100%).

Question 10 asked teachers about the amount of time they spent in planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Q8: Purpose of Meetings</th>
<th>Q10: Time Spent</th>
<th>Q11: Vs. Planning Indiv.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 n=5</td>
<td>Share Expertise 80%</td>
<td>More Time 80%</td>
<td>Special Ed. Partners 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Account. 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Para Info 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equity Across Grade 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Access 80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 n=4</td>
<td>Share Expertise 100%</td>
<td>More Time 75%</td>
<td>Special Ed. Partners 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Account. 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Para Info 75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equity Across Grade 75%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Access 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total n=9</td>
<td>Share Expertise 89%</td>
<td>More Time 78%</td>
<td>Special Ed. Partners 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Account. 100%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Para Info 89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equity Across Grade 89%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Access 89%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
meetings. The majority of teachers in both grade levels perceived that the amount of time spent in planning meetings was the right amount. One teacher responded that she would, like to have an extra monthly session, “to dig move deeply into large projects”, and one teacher responded that while she valued the planning sessions, she hoped that in the future her team would, “be able to do it more quickly”. This subject also noted that the team was newly formed that year and that they were “spending time sharing a lot of ideas”. These themes showed variance in the grade level with grade 1 themes limited to the right amount of time (80%) and more time (20%) and grade 4 themes limited to the right amount of time (75%) and less time (25%).

The final themes that emerged in the focus groups were from Question 11, about differences in preparation for instruction if teachers planned alone. Themes that emerged from this question were access to special education teachers, access to paraprofessional information and access to colleagues. Teachers shared that the input they gained from planning with their grade level special education partners was beneficial. Additionally, they referenced the school’s co-teacher model as making that partnership more viable. As one general education teacher shared, “She doesn’t just come to planning meetings though. She’s a teacher in the classroom. She knows all the students.” Similarly, teachers responded that access to their colleagues in a structured and ongoing way made a difference from planning individually. Teachers also believed without the collaborative structures that are unique to the school, they would not have access to input from paraprofessionals (gained in debriefing) which would impact their planning. These themes were present across both grade levels, grade 1 (80-100%) and grade 4 (75-100%).
Observations

In analysis of data from observations of four consecutive debriefing sessions the theme of *paraprofessional input* emerged. Paraprofessional input included information related to student engagement, student behavior and referenced successes and challenges paraprofessionals had in directly supporting individual students in directly using teacher created modifications and accommodations. Table 18 shows the distribution of paraprofessional comments on the topics of student behavior, student engagement and shared successes and challenges in supporting students directly with accommodations and modifications for both grade levels; grade 1 (7-38%) and grade 4 (9-41%).

The observation data reflects a low percentage of comments by paraprofessionals specifically related to accommodations and modification as compared to a higher percentage of comments related to student engagement and behavior. It is also important to note that while paraprofessional did not mention curricular extension specifically, comments regarding student engagement and behavior may represent connections to the need for it. Since curricular adaptation is a developed professional skill, lack of comment on extension and fewer comments on modifications and accommodations may be related to the level of training and experience held by each paraprofessional.

Summary

In summary, findings from interviews and observations indicate a relationship between debriefing on planning for students of varied abilities. Data analyzed from teacher interviews, focus groups and observation yielded the themes which included
shared accountability, shared responsibility for students with disabilities, review of IEP goals, and information from paraprofessionals. The strongest relationships triangulated between interviews, focus groups and observations related to information shared by paraprofessionals in the areas of student behavior and engagement related to implementation of teacher created modifications and accommodations. Teacher perceptions indicated that the impact of debriefing on planning for students of varied abilities came through the structure and format of the debriefing process as well as the information shared by team members during the sessions.

Table 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Paraprofessional Input In Debriefing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed Paraprofessional Input During Debriefing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Debriefing and Common Grade Level Planning: Reflective Practice

Research Question #5: How do teachers perceive the impact of school-wide daily debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on themselves as reflective practitioners?

As shown in Table 19, data collected on how debriefing informed grade level planning was obtained through teacher individual interviews (questions 4-6), focus groups interviews (questions 4, 6), observations of four consecutive debriefing sessions and one planning session for each of the two grade levels. Themes that emerged through teacher interviews and observations are shown in Tables 20-22 and described below.

Table 19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 5</th>
<th>Instruments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Teacher Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do teachers perceive the impact of school-wide daily debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on themselves as reflective practitioners?</td>
<td>Questions 8, 10, 11, 13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collected on teacher perception of the impact of daily debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on themselves as reflective practitioners were obtained through teacher interviews and focus groups. Findings from data analysis is shown in Tables 19-21 and described below.
Interviews

Questions 8, 10, 11 and 13 from the teacher interview protocol (see Appendix D) were related to the fifth research question. Tables 20 and 21 illustrate the themes that emerged from teacher responses to interview questions. Table 20 shows the themes found from analysis of interview questions 8 and 10 and Table 21 shows the themes found from analysis of questions 11 and 13.

Table 20

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Q8: Team Member Feedback</th>
<th>Q10: Planning Alone?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>Specific Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes that emerged from question 8 on the use of team member feedback include; trust, experience with specific feedback and professional growth. All teachers interviewed responded that the experience of having team member feedback in both debriefing and common grade level planning promoted the development of trust within their team. As one teacher shared, “It takes practice, but when you sit with your colleagues every day and talk about what is hard for you, you build a relationship. We trust each other professionally”. Teachers described development of trust as a result of the ongoing practice of sharing information in debriefing and grade level planning. When
asked about the uses of and their response to specific feedback, teachers recalled specific instances where a colleague’s feedback was particularly helpful to them and discussed the incorporation of collegial feedback into ongoing practice. Teachers described the debriefing and common grade level planning as collaborative processes and structures that contributed to their professional growth. These themes were present across grade levels grade 1 (80-100%) and grade 4 (75-100%).

Findings from interview question 10 (Table 20) regarding teacher perceptions on the experience of planning for instruction alone. Teachers with previous experience in other schools with different structures (grade 1, 60% and grade 4, 50%) described their experiences, and teachers who had only the experience of common grade level planning in the selected site described their perception of how the experience might be different. Two common themes emerged from teacher perceptions regardless of prior experience which included; the perception of being isolated within a grade level without structures to support collaboration and lack of opportunity to exchange ideas. These themes were present in both grade levels, grade 1 (80-100%) and grade 4 (100%).

Table 21 illustrates themes resulting from interview questions 11 and 13. Question 11 asked teachers how debriefing together impacts their planning sessions and yielded the themes of team building, being prepared for planning, and knowledge of all students across the grade level. The ongoing process of debriefing provides a structure for time together away from students to exchange information promotes reflection. Teachers noted that debriefing better prepares them for planning by allowing for discussion of classroom happenings and provides them with knowledge of what is going on in other classrooms using common lessons and plans. Additionally, teachers perceived that
knowledge of students across their grade level allowed them to learn from each other and to better understand their colleagues’ practice and experiences. These themes were present in data from both grade levels; grade 1 (60-100%) and grade 4 (75-100%).

Table 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Q11: Impact of</th>
<th>Q13: Value for</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Team Building</td>
<td>Prep for Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview question 13 (Table 21), asked teachers about the value they placed on time spent in daily debriefing and common grade level planning. Themes that emerged from this question were teacher belief that both structures were a *valuable use of their time, the connection between the processes*, and the opportunity to *obtain peer feedback*. Teachers responded that both processes were a valuable use of their time and that they were connected and that each supported the other. This value for and connection between the processes was further supported by the opportunity obtain continuous feedback from colleagues during both debriefing and common grade level planning. One teacher noted, “We can’t go without planning, of course, but debriefing is what makes it…more informed. We know what’s going on and we’ve talked to each other about it. We don’t spend planning time talking about a lesson that bombed, because we already know that.”
These themes were present in both grade levels; grade 1 (60-80%) and grade 4 (75-100%).

Focus Groups

Questions 7, 9 and 11 from focus group interviews (see Appendix E) contributed to the findings for understanding teacher perceptions on the impact of debriefing and common grade level planning in themselves as reflective practitioners. Table 22 shows themes from teacher responses to all three questions in focus groups.

Table 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Q7: Debriefing Impact</th>
<th>Q9: Learning in Planning</th>
<th>Q11: Planning Alone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>80% 100% 80%</td>
<td>60% 80% 80%</td>
<td>60% 80% 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=5</td>
<td>100% 100% 100%</td>
<td>75% 75% 75%</td>
<td>50% 75% 75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>90% 100% 90%</td>
<td>80% 88% 78%</td>
<td>56% 100% 68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n=4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>90% 100% 90%</td>
<td>80% 88% 78%</td>
<td>56% 100% 68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The themes from Question 7 regarding the impact of debriefing on the grade level team were; *team building, trust, and support*. These themes were similar to the ones that emerged from teacher responses to the impact of debriefing on grade level planning. Teachers indicated that the routine and practice of debriefing leads to team building and
trust specifically related to the routine of sharing successes and challenges regularly. Teachers also shared that within the debriefing process, they find daily support for aspects of their work which can be challenging including classroom management, organizing work and differentiation. These themes were present in both grade levels, grade 1 (80-100%) and grade 4 (100%).

Question 9 asked teachers what they learn from each other in planning meetings. Themes emerged that included becoming well versed in *content standards*, better prepared to *address the spectrum of learning needs* that they found in their classrooms and teachers responded that in planning meetings, they *learn how to collaborate*. The first two themes related to students and instruction. Teachers reported that the planning process supported their individual professional growth. They discussed the opportunity to access content specializations and expertise of their colleagues. One teacher said, “I am a first year teacher and she (a team member) has a masters degree in special education and has studied reading instruction for years. I learn from her every time we sit down in planning”. Finally teachers shared their perspective that collaboration is a skill that requires learning and practice. They described the process of developing collaboration skills; “like anything we do, we get better at it with practice”. These themes were present in both grade levels; grade 1, (60-80%) and grade 4 (100%).

The final themes that emerged from focus groups were from Question 11, asking teachers about differences in preparation for instruction if teachers planned alone. Themes that emerged were based on responses in the discussion where teachers shared what would be missing if they planned alone. The themes from Question 11 were; in
planning alone teachers felt they would expend time and energy seeking support from colleagues, have limited ideas, and less effective plans. Teachers shared a perception that they would have to work harder to access support from colleagues and that without that engagement they would be limited to their own ideas for engaging students and presenting content. They also discussed a concern that in planning alone they would have limited ideas for problem solving student needs requiring differentiated instruction. Teachers summarized their perceptions by sharing that without the structure of their planning meetings; their plans for instruction would be less effective. These themes emerged across grade levels; grade 1 (60-80%) and grade 4 (50-75%).

Summary

In summary, findings from teacher interviews indicate a relationship between debriefing and planning on teachers’ development as reflective practitioners. The relationships among the themes triangulated between interviews and focus groups were twofold. The first was around reflection on professional growth and included the broad themes of access to colleague expertise and experience, obtaining feedback and access to new ideas for instruction. The second broad theme was related to the structures of debriefing and planning and included the development of trust within the teams, value for both processes, and the opportunity to improve collaboration skills. Teacher responses indicate value for the time spent in the structures of debriefing and planning and there is an indication of preference for participation in the school’s collaboration processes.
**Summary of Findings**

In summary, data analyzed from teacher interviews, focus groups and observations were conducted to address the five research question topics: (1) information brought to debriefing, (2) the impact that information has on planning for all students, (3) the impact of common grade level planning sessions on differentiation (4) impact of weekly common grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiation of instruction and the (5) impact of both collaborative structures on teachers as reflective practitioners. Findings from interviews and observations indicated relationships between school-wide collaboration structures of debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on planning for differentiation.

First, information brought to debriefing sessions indicates that teachers discussed student behavior, student engagement and adaptations. Themes that emerged were related to differentiation, particularly in the content subjects of reading, written language and math. Second, teachers indicated that time spent in debriefing led to more expedient planning and was a useful structure in preparation for planning. Debriefing sessions facilitated differentiated grade level planning for students who needed curricular extensions or accommodations. Third, findings on the impact of grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiated instruction indicated that teachers discussed the spectrum of student learning needs with an emphasis on curricular adaptations and access to shared expertise. Fourth, a relationship between debriefing on planning was found, with interviews and observations reflecting themes on shared accountability, shared responsibility for students with disabilities, review of IEP goals, and information from
paraprofessionals. Finally, teachers discussed their professional growth through debriefing and planning meetings, indicating that they learned from colleague expertise and experience, obtaining feedback and access to new ideas for instruction and developing of trust within the teams. Teachers talked about the value for the time spent in the structures of debriefing and planning and overall, participation in the school’s collaboration processes.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the study’s research findings. First, a summary of the study is provided, including an overview of the problem statement, purpose, research questions, and methodology. Second, major findings and limitations of the study are discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with implications for educational policy and practice, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

Overview of the Problem

The need for teacher collaboration is increasing, given the variety of learning needs found in classrooms across the United States including students with a wide range of languages, ethnicities, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and abilities (Annual Report to Congress, 2008; Garafano & Sable, 2008). To address diversity in student learning, teachers need to provide differentiated instruction to address student needs. Research indicates that collaboration facilitates differentiated instruction, especially when general and special educators plan together (Friend, Cook, Chamberlain & Shramburger, 2010, Levine & Marcus, 2007, Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2007). However, little research is available on collaborative models that impact differentiated instruction. To address the need to facilitate differentiated instruction, this study was designed to examine a collaborative model and its impact on instructional planning for differentiation.
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the impact of collaboration and specifically, debriefing and grade level planning meetings on instructional planning for differentiation. It was anticipated that a better understanding of this phenomenon could assist school system and instructional leaders in systematizing collaborative processes to facilitate effective planning and differentiation for a variety of learners.

Research Questions

This study examines the overall research question: How do school-wide systems of daily debriefing and weekly common grade level planning meetings impact preparation for differentiated instruction? To address this question, data were gathered and reviewed to address the following five questions: 1) What information is brought to the debriefing sessions? 2) How does debriefing inform and impact grade level planning? 3) How do teachers perceive the impact of daily debriefing on planning for students with varied abilities? 4) How do teachers perceive the impact of weekly common grade level planning meetings on preparation for differentiation of instruction? 5) How do teachers perceive the impact of school-wide daily debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on themselves as reflective practitioners?

Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to understand the research questions. The intellectual orientation that best represents approach is the Interpretive Paradigm. The researcher’s aim was to understand, “the complex and constructed reality from the point of view of those who live it (Schram, 2006). The methods used in this qualitative study
included observations of consecutive debriefing sessions and common grade level planning sessions, and interviews conducted with individual teachers and focus groups in each of the grade level teams. The sample used for examination of debriefing and common grade level planning practices included teachers in two separate grade level teams including primary and upper grades. The interview and focus group protocols used to collect data were based on recurring themes in current literature related to differentiation and collaboration among teachers. Audio taped interviews were transcribed and reviewed by participants and manually coded to determine recurring emerging themes. The coded themes were organized into broad themes and related subthemes that addressed research questions and contributed to an understanding of the perceptions of teacher participants.

**Summary of Major Findings**

Findings from interviews and observations conducted in this study indicated relationships between school-wide collaboration structures of debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on planning for differentiation. First, information brought to debriefing sessions indicates that teachers discussed student behavior, student engagement and adaptations. Themes that emerged were related to differentiation, particularly in the content subjects of reading, written language and math. Second, teachers indicated that time spent in debriefing led to more expedient planning and was a useful structure in preparation for planning. Debriefing sessions facilitated differentiated grade level planning for students who needed curricular extensions or accommodations. Third, findings on the impact of grade level planning meetings on preparation for
differentiated instruction indicated that teachers discussed the spectrum of student learning needs with an emphasis on curricular adaptations and access to shared expertise. Fourth, a relationship between debriefing on planning was found, with interviews and observations reflecting themes on shared accountability, shared responsibility for students with disabilities, review of IEP goals, and information from paraprofessionals. Finally, teachers discussed their professional growth through debriefing and planning meetings, indicating that they learned from colleague expertise and experience, obtaining feedback and access to new ideas for instruction and developing of trust within the teams. Teachers talked about the value for the time spent in the structures of debriefing and planning and overall, participation in the school’s collaboration processes.

**Discussion**

This section is organized to address each of the research questions, and discusses the examination of the collaborative structures of daily debriefing and common grade level planning on preparation for differentiated instruction. Based on the research questions and findings, discussion is organized to include: (1) debriefing information, (2) the impact of debriefing on planning for all students (3) the impact of common grade level planning on differentiation, and (4) the impact of debriefing and common grade level planning on teachers’ reflection on their practice.

**Debriefing Information**

Information brought to debriefing sessions reflected an awareness of the need for differentiation for individual and small groups of students across both grade levels studied. Teachers reported that the structure of daily debriefing provided them with the
opportunity to exchange information and experiences with their colleagues and paraprofessionals across a grade level. Teachers noted that debriefing provided them with an opportunity to reflect on and gain feedback for their teaching practices and are consistent with Little (2002), who proposes that collaborative structures may provide teachers with the opportunity to “replay” actual classroom events.

Teachers in both grade levels reported that as team members share successes and challenges, topics often begin with student engagement and behavior that prompts connections for the need to differentiate instruction through adaptations, curriculum extensions, or modification. Specifically, the areas of math, reading and written language emerged as themes in information brought to debriefing. Teachers shared that these topics emerged to address basic skills in reading or math. While this study did not examine student achievement, a study by Goddard and Tschannen-Moran (2007) found that teacher collaboration was a statistically significant predictor of student achievement in mathematics and reading. It may be that the perceptions of the teachers in this study are connected to addressing the needs of students in reading and math which could be linked to the value they found in debriefing information.

Teachers perceived that they had access to daily insight into the learning needs of their students and had an opportunity to obtain feedback or work with others to pinpoint individual student needs for problem solving later in planning sessions. Consistent with findings by Hinden, Morocco, Mott and Aguilar (2007), ongoing collaborative feedback from colleagues contributed to understanding student learning needs.
The Impact of Debriefing on Planning for All Students

Findings from the interviews and observations indicate that debriefing set the stage for planning by providing teachers with daily opportunities to review successes and challenges and discuss how common lessons met the needs of a variety of students in different classrooms across the grade level. Moreover, the data suggest that teachers learn about lesson pacing in debriefing from the larger sample of classrooms in their grade level. Teachers perceived that access to information and feedback on student engagement and behavior leads to an examination of the match between assignments and instruction and consideration of the need for differentiation for all students. These findings are consistent with Hourcade, Parrette and Anderson (2003) who found a relationship between collaborative processes designed for teachers to exchange information on lessons in common grade levels and teacher perceptions related to student success.

Interview and observation data across both grade levels suggests that information from debriefing sessions provides access to varied approaches and strategies from colleagues and paraprofessionals. Information from paraprofessionals obtained in debriefing appears to provide teachers with insight to student needs from a vantage point of ongoing and close proximity to students. The impact of collaboration with paraprofessionals as contributing team members was studied by Giangreco, Edleman and Broer (2001). While the study was focused on paraprofessional perceptions rather than teachers’, a noted theme included value paraprofessionals felt from teachers for their input on student progress and needs. Similarly, teachers in the current study placed value on the opportunity to have a routine structure for access to paraprofessional observation
and insight blended with varied strategies shared by their colleagues for all students including those who require curricular extension, accommodation and modification. As one teacher noted in referring to the opportunity to debrief with paraprofessionals, “The paraprofessionals in my classroom know so much about our students, there’s no other time that I really get to hear that.”

Another aspect of debriefing that appears to impact planning for differentiation is ongoing review of IEP goals. The school-wide process of debriefing includes the routine of recording anecdotal information pertaining to individual student progress towards individual goals. Teacher perceptions included a sense that both the act of reflection on goals and the review of what is documented by themselves and paraprofessionals in their classrooms provide ongoing reference points from debriefing connects to planning. While this specific process was not evident in the review of literature, a study by Brownell, Adams & Sindelar (2006) suggests review of IEP goals shapes the responsibility that general educators feel for academic goals of students with disabilities who are placed in their classrooms for all or part of the day.

The Impact of Common Grade Level Planning on Differentiation

Findings from interview and observation data suggest that a number of aspects of the process of common grade level planning contribute to preparation for differentiation. As found by Tomlinson and McTighe (2006), differentiation facilitates learning for a variety of students. According to Eddinger, (2003) the broad spectrum of students encountered by teachers in classrooms today must be met with equally broad plans for instruction. As indicated by findings in this study, common grade level planning provides access to varied experience and expertise. As concisely put by a teacher in the
study, “I don’t care who you are or where you teach. No one person has all the expertise we need to teach all of the different kids that are in the schools I have worked in.”

 Teachers noted that partnership with special education teachers contributed to group expertise in the planning and development of curricular accommodations and modifications that can be targeted to students. Interactions between general and special educators have been widely studied and outcomes appear promising when structure and expectations are provided for planning and discussion (Dieker, 2001). Findings from a study conducted by Dieker, (2001) in examining planning meetings of nine teams of special and general educators, indicated that teachers perceived that expectations remained high for all students when time was dedicated to discussing individual student needs in collaboration with special education partners.

 In this study, the opportunity to share ideas for curricular adaptation for the spectrum of students including those who are high achieving and those with disabilities appeared valuable. Teachers referred to the contribution of group experience with different types of learning needs, including students who are gifted as a resource. Hinden, Morocco, Mott and Aguilar (2007) examined teachers’ joint problem solving. While themes of sharing expertise and benefit from the process were promising, outcomes appeared limited by opportunities to collaborate. It may be that this level of collaboration and partnership would not be as routine and developed without the school-wide structure of common grade level planning.

 Related to the format and process of common grade level planning is the aspect of shared responsibility for all students across each grade level. Findings from this study indicate that the structure of common grade level planning may promote shared
responsibility for all students. Specifically, themes indicated that all teachers place value on common grade level planning time as an opportunity to share expertise to plan for the needs of all students in the grade level. In a related study of two Southern California school districts, researchers found that the use of time for planning differed within schools, however time for planning was seen as an “essential feature” by respondents in addressing the learning needs of students with varying abilities (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello & Spagna, 2004, p.111).

In both grade levels of this study, teachers developed common lesson plans in each classroom and took responsibility for materials preparation in individually assigned content areas such as math and reading for the entire grade level. In practice this means a teacher may be responsible for materials preparation for all classes in the grade level, which may foster knowledge of the learning needs for a wider variety of students while providing for access to collegial expertise. This group accountability may lead to more thorough discussions and preparation for students in need of differentiation.

**Practitioner Reflection and Professional Growth**

In describing planning sessions teachers noted that part of their professional growth stems from a sense of accountability and responsibility for the learning of all students within their grade level. Themes of knowledge of all students, shared expertise and peer feedback connected to value for the process and teachers’ perceived ability to impact the learning of all students. As described in three noted studies on collaborative relationships and structures, when time and expectations are set for planning, teachers are more likely to work together to address the achievement of all students (Friend & Cook, 2000, Hourcade, Parette & Anderson, 2003, Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran,
While the school-wide mandates and routine nature of the collaboration structures appear to contribute to a culture of shared responsibility for all students, teachers shared that they also benefited as professionals from the processes.

Findings from interviews suggest that debriefing and collaborative grade level planning promote ongoing reflection by teachers on their practice and are a contributing factor to their professional growth. The theme of trust for team members was seen as a factor in teacher learning and refinement of practice. As described by a teacher, “When you talk about what is hard for you, you build a relationship. We trust each other professionally.” In studying the development of trust among teachers while giving and receiving feedback, Achinstein, (2002), found that without structure and administrative support, teachers viewed collaboration and a risk to harmony and collegiality. It may be that successful and productive relationships among teachers can be fostered by structures such as the ones found in this study.

Interview data included teacher perceptions that collaboration skills were fostered by the ongoing practice of debriefing and planning. As one teacher noted, in describing growth as a collaborator, “Like anything we do, we get better at it with practice.” In a study of twelve sporadic (uneven intervals) after school meetings in one grade level in one school, transcripts yielded data indicating that teachers varied widely in the amount of sharing they did with regard to their instructional practices (Hinden, Morocco, Mott and Aguilar, 2007). This study contributes to the research, indicating a connection between regular collaborative practices and the development of trust and sharing information.
Data from this study indicate that both debriefing and common grade level planning contribute to the development of grade level teams and team building by providing regular access to collegial support and information away from the demands of instruction and classroom management. During interviews, teachers discussed the value of both debriefing and planning processes and perceive them as symbiotic, each supportive of the other. Taken together, the findings suggest that debriefing and common grade level planning provide a comprehensive collaboration system that promotes professional growth for individuals and teaching teams.

Limitations

This study was carefully designed to investigate the perceptions of teachers on the impact of the school-wide collaborative structures of daily debriefing and common grade level planning in planning for differentiated instruction. However, generalizations should be interpreted with caution, given the following limitations. First, the study provides findings from two grade levels in a single, small suburban charter elementary school implementing a unique model for teacher collaboration. Second, the findings are based on the perceptions of a small number of participants. While the number of participants is small, it represents a variety of teachers with different experiences in the field, and number of years teaching. Third, some of the problems, issues, and experiences encountered by this group of teachers in this charter school may be unique to their working conditions and may not be typical of those in other more traditional schools.

Fourth, this study is limited by the lack of connection to student achievement data which relates specifically to outcomes for differentiated instruction. The findings relate only to the perceptions of the teachers and not the outcomes for their students. Finally,
the study only explored the perceptions of teachers in an elementary setting and teachers working in secondary schools may encounter unique issues related to subject based instruction and teaming. This study can, however, offer valuable insights into the perceptions of teachers related to work within teams and experience with school-mandated structures that foster collaboration. The ability to generalize these findings, however, should not be dismissed, given the consistency of themes with research findings from highlighted studies regarding collaboration and planning for differentiated instruction.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

The need for teacher collaboration is increasing, given the variety of learning needs found in classrooms across the United States including students with a wide range of languages, ethnicities, cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, and abilities. Instructional expertise required to effectively meet the diverse needs of students heterogeneously grouped in classrooms requires partnerships among teachers (Friend, Cook, Chamberlain & Shramburger, 2010, Levine & Marcus, 2007, Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2007). Structured, consistent collaborative processes in teams may promote differentiated instruction throughout a grade level or subject and address the need to prepare curriculum for students with a wide variety of learning needs who are in classrooms today (Subban, 2006, Greathouse & Lincoln, 2008). Findings from this study of embedded school-wide collaboration systems led to implications for policy and practice illustrated in Figure 1.

**Structured Collaborative Practices to Promote Differentiation**

Organizationally mandated and administratively supported collaboration structures may be a way to ensure ongoing teacher professional interactions. Moreover,
the development of routine collaboration structures may promote accessible, deeper and ongoing professional relationships among teaching teams to support student learning. Research indicates better academic and behavioral outcomes for students when collaboration and differentiation are combined (Cramer, Nevin, Voight, & Salazar, 2006, Garrigan & Thousand, 2006, Hall, 2002). While the studied site allowed for the examination of only one for collaboration, the implications are notable in that teachers perceived value from the processes in planning for the learning of all students.

Much more widely practiced is the structure of common grade level planning which may contribute to teachers’ joint expertise and problem solving to address the learning needs of a wide variety of students. As schools and districts consider the development and implementation of planning structures, leaders have a variety of models to examine including those highlighted in this study. Less evident in the literature is the use of debriefing protocols which may be a low impact, high return structure that can support the development of grade level or subject specific teams. The dedicated time and protocols for debriefing examined in this study are only one example of how to implement review of practice among teams. Debriefing requires minimal time, no preparation and little more than awareness level training. Results from this study indicate that the practice itself assists participants in access to feedback, strategies and information.

Support and Professional Growth for Teachers

Current literature and school reform systems have identified collaboration systems as a stimulus for individual teacher growth (Furney, Aiken, Hasazi & Clark, 2005). Findings from this study indicate teachers benefit professionally from both
debriefing and collaborative grade level planning for reflection and professional development. In debriefing teachers found an outlet and sounding board for immediate and daily challenges they faced in their classrooms along with opportunity to reflect on practice and obtain support and feedback from colleagues. As leaders in learning organizations consider the benefits of embedded collaboration systems, consideration for teacher growth and support related to the following are possible benefits:

1) Sharing with colleagues and the outlet for challenges that debriefing provides may be a consistent support mechanism for new teachers as well as an avenue to explore for retaining new teachers. Guidance for new teachers in the work of planning for instruction including differentiation and ideas for student engagement may be supported by common grade level planning.  

2) Debriefing and common grade level planning may also provide an opportunity for more veteran teachers to develop as mentors and leaders through practice in collaboration, assisting colleagues in problem solving and providing feedback.

While the process of common grade level planning may facilitate practitioner reflection, it also may support professional development in content knowledge, lesson design and differentiation. In this study, teachers described opportunities to delve into content standards, curricular domains, and strategies for students requiring remediation in basic skills of reading and mathematics in connection to common grade level planning. According to teacher perceptions, collaborative grade level planning is unlikely to occur if not supported by school culture and administration. As school and district leaders work to promote practices that support learning in climates of constrained budgets and limited resources, consideration for collaborative planning structures can provide a
template for addressing the needs of a wide variety of students while providing for learning and shared expertise among teachers.

**Connections with and Information from Paraprofessionals**

Paraprofessionals supporting students with disabilities and assigned to supplement school programs in daily classroom activities are a valuable resource. Research indicates that paraprofessionals can be given responsibilities related to teaching without support or feedback (Giangreco, Edelman & Broer, 2001). In turn, teachers may struggle to find time to connect with paraprofessionals to understand their connections to students and obtain insight from their work in classrooms. While paraprofessionals were not included in the sample studied, data from the debriefing process indicated the use of information gained from those team members by teachers. As school districts struggle with constrained budgets and allocation of special education resources, the development of practices to generate partnerships between teachers and paraprofessionals may be useful. Collaboration structures like debriefing may facilitate ongoing feedback, support and training for paraprofessionals and foster a sense of responsibility for all students.

**Promotion of Least Restrictive Environment**

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 has defined more rigorous requirements for students with disabilities to have access to core content in typical classroom settings. Instructional expertise required to effectively meet the diverse needs of students heterogeneously grouped in classrooms requires partnerships among general and special education teachers (Friend, Cook, Chamberlain & Shramburger, 2010, Levine & Marcus, 2007, Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2007). The development of processes for general and
special education teachers to work together to meet the unique needs of students with
disabilities in general education classrooms can be constrained by time and requirements
for teaching in separate programs. As leaders in learning organizations work to meet
Federal mandates and ensure best practices, collaboration structures need to be examined.
Findings from this study provide one example for how special education teachers can
access information on student progress and partner with their general education
colleagues in joint planning to meet individual learning needs.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study extends research on teacher collaboration and practices that may
promote planning for differentiation. Findings from this study point to the need for
further research to examine specific collaboration structures and outcomes for students
and teachers. Information on different collaborative models and the relationship to
student outcomes may provide for better understanding of the efficacy of a variety of
systems. A focus on outcomes for students in heterogeneous learning environments with
different types of learning needs including those who are high achieving, have disabilities
and are typically developing may lead to a better understanding of how different
collaboration systems impact student learning.

In a study examining the relationships between collaboration and student
achievement, Goddard, Goddard and Tschannen-Moran (2007), concluded that while
teacher collaboration may improve student achievement, the relationship is likely to be
related to teacher improvement of instructional practices rather than providing direct
impact on individual students. This conclusion may be further addressed by the study of
specific systems while considering the aspects of the collaboration model in the current
study. It may be that dual processes such as debriefing and common grade level planning are complementary in providing information on students that can be used in the process of instructional planning.

While school leadership and an ethnographic examination of the sampled site were not a part of the current study, further research on training and support for collaborative processes as they are embedded within schools is warranted. In their thorough review of the literature on collaboration as a teacher learning tool, Brownell, Adams, Sindelar and Waldron (2006) discuss that while the benefits of collaboration have been established, “organizational conditions” may stand in the way of “innovation adoption and sustained use” (p.170). These authors assert that all teachers do not learn equally from the experience of collaboration and that there is a lack of research demonstrating, “How beliefs and knowledge about content and students might work together to allow teachers to profit or not profit from professional collaboration.” (p.179). Additional study of how a variety of collaboration models are initiated and sustained may contribute to the literature.

Further examination of processes like debriefing may facilitate exchange of information between teachers and paraprofessionals. Contributions made by paraprofessionals regarding observations and insight to students may be used in planning meetings. Giangreco, Edleman and Broer (2001), studied the experiences of professionals participating as classroom team members. This work identifies the themes of appreciation, trust, value, and the desire on the part of paraprofessionals to participate in the collaborative process. Additional study of collaboration structures that include participation by paraprofessionals may provide information on how ongoing and
structured conversations support training and feedback and impact planning for instruction.

Continued examination of collaborative processes and the outcomes for teachers and students is an important contribution to the field. Current research examines the benefits of collaboration and how varied processes and structures provide for teacher interactions for in order for educators to share professional insights. Understanding general education teacher, special education teacher and paraprofessional roles and contributions in sharing information, may assist faculty and classroom staff in facilitating more dynamic learning environments. Finally, this study was limited to examining the link between collaboration and planning for differentiation. Given the promising findings on differentiated planning, a natural extension of this study would be to research the impact of debriefing and planning for differentiation on the implementation of differentiated instruction and student outcomes.
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Center on Access the General Curriculum, CAST, US Office of Special Education Programs.


Appendix A

Research Announcement:

Study to be conducted at the CHIME Charter Elementary School:  
*The Impact of School-Wide Collaboration Systems: Planning for Differentiation*

The proposed research will examine the impact of daily debriefing and collaborative grade level planning on teacher preparation for curricular differentiation. Data collection will include observations of debriefing and grade level planning sessions of grade levels one and five. Teachers in these grade levels are invited to participate in observations, interviews and focus groups in to provide data to examine the impact of school wide collaboration systems on differentiation.

Potential participants should contact Julie Fabrocini at 206-310-8014 or by email at: julie.fabrocini@gatesfoundation.org
Appendix B

Invitation to Participate

The Impact of School-Wide Collaboration Systems: Planning for Differentiation

Dear CHIME Teachers:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study that I am conducting for my doctoral studies program at California State University, Northridge. The study explores teacher perceptions regarding the school-wide practice of debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on planning for differentiated instruction. As part of my work, I will interview and observe teaching teams consisting of general and special educators in first and fifth grades. Throughout this process, I will analyze data across grade levels. **This study will assess the aspects and impact of debriefing and common grade level planning, not the performance of participating faculty.**

Your assistance with this project would be most helpful. This research will help me understand the aspects of daily and weekly collaborative processes and impact on planning for instruction. **Participation in the study is voluntary and the decision to participate or not will have no impact on performance evaluations.** Participation may be a benefit to you to stimulate your thinking about the ways that you and your colleagues use systematic collaborative processes. I would like to conduct interviews with each credentialed member of the teaching teams in grades one and five. The interviews will take about an hour and I would like to tape your responses to my questions. I will share the transcript with you and you may add or delete any comments. Additionally, I will conduct focus groups with each grade level team to gather data. There are no known risks from participating in the project and there will be no names used: you, the school, and your colleagues will remain anonymous. The tape recording will be destroyed as soon as I have transcribed the tape.

I would also like to observe debriefing and planning sessions for each of the identified grade levels. The observations will focus on teacher interactions, reflection and the development of curriculum. In observing planning sessions, I would be most interested in the way teachers work together and use information gained during debriefing sessions. As part of my research skill development, I am also learning how to conduct ‘member checks’ which will allow teachers to review collected data, so I will be happy to share any notes that I take during my observations.

I will contact each teacher individually to determine willingness to participate. All interviews and observations will be scheduled at your convenience and will not interfere with administrative or teaching responsibilities. The identities of participants will remain confidential. If you do not wish to participate, simply let me know at any time before or during the study.

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments about this research and your participation in this study, you may contact the following:

1. Julie Fabrocini (Graduate Researcher) via email at: julie.fabrocini@gatesfoundation.org
2. Nancy Burstein (Dissertation Chair) via email at: nancy.burstein@csun.edu

I look forward to talking with you about your experiences. I appreciate your time and contribution to the field of education and in helping me complete this research project.
Thank you, again, for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie Fabrocini
Appendix C

Consent to Participate in Research

*The Impact of School-Wide Collaboration Systems: Planning for Differentiation*

You have been invited to participate in a study by Julie Fabrocini, M.A. from the Education and Leadership Policy Studies department of the Eisner College of Education at California State University, Northridge. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a (a) teacher in a target grade level at the CHIME Charter School. **Your participation in this study is voluntary.**

This consent form includes information on (1) the purpose of the study, (2) procedures, (3) potential risks and discomforts for subjects, (4) potential benefits for subjects, (5) compensation for participation, (6) confidentiality, (7) participation and withdrawal, (8) identification of investigator, (9) rights of research subjects, (10) right to know, (11) use of data, and (12) signature of research subjects.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study is an evaluation of the impact of debriefing and common grade level planning meetings on differentiation in instructional planning. I am interested in examining the issues related to systematic collaboration on planning for the learning of students with varied abilities. The goal of this study is to learn from and possibly improve the program.

**Procedures**

If you elect to participate in this study you will be asked to do the following:

1. Participate in a 30 minute individual interview. Subjects will be interviewed by the researcher regarding perceptions of debriefing and its uses. Interviews will be audio taped with participant permission.
2. Participate in a focus group. Each grade level team will come together to discuss uses of debriefing and possible outcomes on curricular planning for differentiation. Focus groups will be audio taped with the permission of all participants.
3. Participate in observed grade level debriefing sessions. The researcher will attend three prearranged debriefing sessions for each grade level and document data through field notes written by the researcher.
4. Participate in observed instructional planning sessions. The researcher will attend one instructional planning session for each grade level subsequent to the observed debriefings. Data will be documented through field notes written by the researcher.

**Potential Risks and Discomforts to Subjects**

This study investigates teacher perceptions of a school-wide program where you work and as such, may address sensitive issues of collegiality and collaboration including experiences with or perceptions of colleagues and students served in the program. You may feel some concern...
answering some interview questions. You may elect not to answer any of the questions with which you feel uneasy and still remain a participant in this study.

The study will be conducted by a school administrator and you may experience some concern that your answers in interview and actions during observation will affect your employment. At no time will any information gathered in this study be used for any evaluation of job performance. You may at any time to cease participation in any group being observed.

Potential Benefits to Subjects

You may benefit professionally from reflection generated in the interview process. Additionally contributing to a study of the school’s practice and examination of the possible benefits of debriefing may contribute to the larger body of knowledge regarding routine collaboration systems. The information gleaned from this study may lead to greater awareness of and support for debriefing and collaborative planning among teachers to meet the needs of all students by providing for curricular problem solving to meet the very diverse needs of students who are high achieving in need of enrichment and those with disabilities requiring accommodations and modifications. It is anticipated that this information may be used to inform the larger community of educators for collaboration to impact planning for curricular differentiation.

Compensation to Subjects for Participation

Participants will receive chart paper, markers and informational handouts during the professional development workshop. No other form of compensation will be provided for participation in this study.

Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Names will not be used in reporting of findings. Every effort will be taken to ensure your confidentiality as a participant in this study. If you consent to participate, you will be assigned a random three digit number to protect you. No identifying information will be used. With your permission interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. You may decline to be recorded and have the recording device turned off at any time during the interview. Prior to the finalization of the study, you will have the option of reviewing and editing your comments as included in the report. Audiotapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in the residence of the principle investigator. Audiotapes will be retained for one year, after which they will be erased. De-identified records in the form of transcriptions will be maintained for a period of one year after they have been transcribed.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are not obligated in any way to answer or respond to any question or to discuss anything that you are not inclined to answer or discuss. You can skip any question, or any part of any question, and will not experience any penalty for answering or not answering, any questions in any way. You may ask that
the audiotape be stopped at any time and/or may leave the interview at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. You may discontinue completing questionnaires and/or any log at any time for any reason without consequences of any kind. You have the right to withdraw your participation even after you have completed your contribution to the project. You have up to 60 days to notify the researcher after you have finished contributing to the project that you would like to withdraw your participation and do not wish the data you provided to be used.

Identification of the Investigator

If you have any questions, concerns, or comments about this research and your participation in this study, you may contact the following:

1. Julie Fabrocini (Graduate Researcher) via email at: jfab@chimeinstitute.org

2. Nancy Burstein (Dissertation Chair) 818-677-3189
   18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330
   and email at: nancy.burstein@csun.edu

Rights of Research Subjects

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You can halt your participation in this study at any time. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, details of this study, or any other concerns, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects at California State University, Northridge 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330 and by phone at 818-677-2901. If you have specific questions about the project you may contact Dr. Nancy Burstein at 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330-8265 or by phone at 818-677-3189.

Right to Know

You have a right to know who will have access to the raw data provided during this research. The researcher and the chair of his dissertation committee will have access to the data for the purposes of analysis. One additional individual who will be compensated by the researcher will have access to the raw data for the purposes of transcribing the interview recordings.

Uses of the Data

The data for this research will primarily be used for the completion of a dissertation written for the completion of the researcher’s Ed.D. program at California State University, Northridge. Other uses may include workshop presentations at the schools or districts where the research was conducted, presentations at regional or national research conferences and/or a research publication. In the case of all the uses of this data,
individuals and settings will be anonymous. In the case of publication, participants will be notified in advance and provided a copy of the work to be published.

**Signature of Research Subjects**

I have read and understand the procedures described in this “Consent to Participate in Research.” My questions have all been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

___________________________
Name of Subject

___________________________
Signature of Subject

____________
Date

**Signature of Investigator or Designee**

In my judgment the research subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

___________________________
Name of Investigator or Designee

___________________________
Signature of Investigator or Designee

____________
Date
Appendix D

Interview Protocol

• How would you describe your role at CHIME?
  Probe if needed for comfort: What have you most enjoyed about the students?

• What would you describe as the purpose of debriefing?
  Who or what do you debrief about?
  What do you feel are the benefits?
  Are there some limitations to the format that you could share?

• How would you describe the format of daily debriefing to a new colleague or staff member?
  Was the process comfortable to you as a new staff member?
  Did you receive any information about the process prior to participation?

• What kinds of information are gathered in the debriefing logs?
  How do you use that information in your work with individual students?
  How does daily reflection on IEP goals for some students impact your understanding of individual learning needs?
  Are there any other ways you use the data collected during debriefing?

• Can you describe some of the ways debriefing impacts the way that you plan other teachers in your grade level team?
  What about your own understanding of other team members, does it affect that?
  What impact has debriefing had on your team’s development as a collaborative group?

• Does the topic of curricular extension for students who are high achieving come up in debriefing?
  How do you use that information?

• During debriefing, do you gain information regarding the need for adjustment or creation of curricular accommodations and modifications?
  What types of learning needs is that connected to?

• Can you think of a time where a curricular topic came up in debriefing; a thread if you will, that came up and was addressed in the following planning meeting?
  Can you think of an example when you learned something about a student’s experience that was helpful to you in teaching them?
• Was there a time when a team member’s feedback was especially helpful to you?
  Was that need more about your own practice or the particular needs of a student?
  How did you feel in receiving the feedback?
  How did that feedback help you the next day?

• Can you describe the process of grade level planning including where and when it happens and what goes on in the meetings?
  How do teachers plan for accessible instruction together?
  How does having access to all grade level team members impact that process?

• Have you had the experience of planning for instruction alone?
  How was that different from the way you plan for instruction now?

• How does debriefing impact your planning sessions with other teachers?
  Can you think of a time when debriefing had an immediate impact on planning?

• What insights have you gained in understanding the need for curricular differentiation from the processes of debriefing and grade level planning meetings?

• Overall how valuable is the time spent in debriefing? In grade level planning?
  Is there another way that you can think of for sharing this type of information or ways to improve debriefing?

• Do you have any other thoughts or suggestions about how the debriefing or grade level planning processes could be improved?
Appendix E

Focus Group Protocol for Grade Level Teams

1. How is everyone doing today?

2. Would all of you say that this week’s debriefing was pretty typical of what goes on during the sessions? Was there anything unusual?

3. Were there topics from the week that continue come up from previous sessions? If so what were they?

4. Is there any curricular theme that you all noticed in the past four days?

5. How are any of the successes or challenges that were shared in the past three days related to curricular differentiation?

6. Is there any specific information shared in the last two debriefing sessions that got any of you thinking about curricular planning? What were they?

7. Do you use the documentation of topics and themes gathered during debriefing in any way?

8. Overall how do you use information from debriefing in planning meetings?

9. How does the opportunity to debrief impact you as a grade level team?

10. What is the purpose of planning together as a grade level team?

11. What do you learn from each other?

12. How much time do you spend in that process? Do you need more or less time?

13. What would be the difference if you planned individually?
Appendix F

Conceptual Model

*The Impact of School-Wide Collaboration Systems: Planning for Differentiation*

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Conceptual Model
J. Fabrocini
2010