

A Room of One's Own: Why It Matters to Teachers

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It is not unusual for teachers of Languages Other Than English (LOTE) to experience teaching without a room to call their own. It was an experience I lived for nine years as a French teacher who was shared by the middle school and high school of my district. I knew from that experience that my life as a teacher was very different based on whether or not I had a room to call my own, and I believed that others could benefit from what I might discover through my study. When I learned that Glickman (1998) also acknowledged the importance to teachers of having their own rooms, I had some theoretical support to pursue my investigation. He recognized that in the culture of American education teachers expect to have a room of their own, a room defined by physical boundaries. Appreciating that such physical boundaries are not always possible, he nonetheless argued that “the teacher’s space must be at least psychologically protected, however, if not physically separated by a closed door or partition” (p. 137).

Now, as an assistant professor who prepares college students to become French and Spanish teachers, I again see how it means so much to teachers to have their own rooms. My own college students were surprised, if not dismayed, to learn that as LOTE teachers they very well might not have their own rooms. This was confirmed for us when we saw a job posting this year for a LOTE teacher stating, “Teacher will have own classroom.” The fact that such a statement was included in the posting is an indication that LOTE teachers often do not have their own classrooms.

So what? Why does it matter to teachers? My study did not set out to determine whether or not teachers need rooms of their own; rather, I wanted to explore and expose the complexities inherent in the relationship teachers have with their classrooms and to heighten our sensitivities to the larger issues affected by the practice of having a room of one’s own. Not surprisingly, there were many issues that surfaced throughout this study.

For the readers of this publication, I will focus on the issues related to relationships with other teachers and the challenges to those relationships caused by the sharing of classrooms. I will 1) introduce the teachers in the study, 2) share their thoughts and experiences, and 3) offer some insights into how to address limited space in schools. I hope that this brief article can serve as support for discussions in your own schools about the best ways to share limited space among teachers, or at least offer some emotional support for teachers struggling to negotiate shared space.

The Research

The data collected from the study were examined within a phenomenological framework. I was interested in seeing how the teachers interpreted their experiences without rooms of their own. I, in turn, analyzed their interpretations. Per Moustakas (1994), this approach allows the study to “illuminate its presence (the phenomenon), accentuate its underlying meanings, enable the phenomenon to linger, retain its spirit, as near to its actual nature as possible” (p. 59).

When most teachers in a school have their own classrooms but a few teachers do not, they may all find themselves thrust into situations that challenge their relationships. There is a growing body of literature (Darling-Hammond, 2005; DuFour, 2004;

Hargreaves, 2001) on the changing relationships of teachers, encouraging them to share ideas, discuss teaching strategies, and work together in planning, teaching, and advising.

Little (1990) uses the term “colleagueship” to describe “a conception of collegiality that goes well beyond a loosely constructed sense of “getting along” and “working well together” (p. 511). Garman (1982) chooses the spelling “colleagiality” over “collegiality” to emphasize the relationships of “colleagues.” Barth (2001) identifies the “classic hallmarks” of such relationships as “talking about practice, sharing craft knowledge, rooting for the success of others, and observing others in their work.” He has observed, however, that “many teachers seem to lack the personal, interpersonal, and group skills essential to the successful exercise of leadership and to working together” (p. 96).

DuFour (1999) notes, “Teaching has continued to be characterized by a single adult, standing alone before 25 children, and working in isolation” (p. 61). Wasley (1994) is concerned that “one teacher, one classroom creates conditions of isolation that work against teachers, preventing many from engaging in thoughtful discourse” (p. 2). If, in fact, a room of one’s own fosters isolation and impedes collegial interaction, then one might assume that teachers who do not have their own rooms would be less isolated and more likely to collaborate. As the literature posits, teaching in the same room, all day, every day inhibits the development of professional learning communities. How, then, does having or not having a room of one’s own inhibit or nurture the development of such communities?

The onus of promoting a sense of community cannot fall on only some teachers. Is it the responsibility of only those teachers who do not have rooms of their own to make the best of the situation? What responsibility do the teachers who have rooms share in promoting a sense of community and collegiality?

The Teachers

The teachers who participated in this study initially responded to a survey distributed to 35 school districts and reaching approximately 4,500 educators. Forty teachers responded. From those, I selected only secondary school teachers who had taught without rooms of their own. I ultimately interviewed, shadowed, and communicated over a school year with eight teachers. (The names used in this article are pseudonyms.)

The teachers shared two definitions of “a room of one’s own.” One definition was teaching all their classes in the same room every day even if other teachers also taught there, but they were unanimous in their belief that the best definition would be that they taught in only one classroom and no other teacher had any duties in that same room throughout the day.

This study explored the perceptions expressed by eight teachers about the importance of having their own classrooms. Just how important was it to them? For Fred, it was “the most humiliating thing” he had ever had to do, so having his own room was more important to him than money: “If I had the choice between \$5,000 and a room of my own, I’d choose the room. Guaranteed.” Tom agreed that he would “choose the place where I had a room of my own even if the pay was significantly lower. I’m talking about 10% or more.” Anita gave it her highest rating: “If I had my own room, and nobody else to share it with, I’d give it a 10.” She went on to explain “that people feel bad about

themselves as teachers when they don't have a space to call home." Patty felt "jealous" when she "had to travel around" and said she would be sad if she ever had to do so again. Not having her own room was cause for Cindy to consider leaving teaching altogether after only one month: "Maybe I'll have to quit! I can't stand it!"

Clearly, there was no question about the importance to the teachers of having their own rooms, but why was it so important? Why did their experiences leave them even more certain that having their own rooms was important? What issues arose that made the experience difficult? What did they learn from the experience? Though they all shared unique stories about their experiences as teachers without rooms of their own, a common thread through all their experiences was the challenges it presented to their relationships with other teachers.

Without rooms of their own, the teachers "shared" other teachers' rooms, prompting a sort of forced relationship. They had a lot to say about how this arrangement tested both their personal and professional relationships with other teachers.

Relationships

Anita had been a math teacher for 17 years, 14 of them in the same school district. The year of this study was her first experience with teaching in different classrooms throughout the day, and she could not hold back her frustration, caused by her sense of lost time and concern for how her choices might infringe upon the rights of the other teachers.

It puts you in an awkward position. . . . You've got that feeling of stepping on other people's toes that you're sharing the room with: "Oh, god, did I set it up just right when I left?" . . . I have to make sure that [the desks] are separated for the next teacher. . . . Oh, gosh, if I don't separate them on time she's not going to be able to begin on time."

Cindy was in her third year as a social studies teacher and second year in her current district. It was March when I interviewed her—more than six months since she began sharing a classroom with another teacher—and the situation had only worsened with each passing day.

I know you're professional and you're not there to be buddies and friends, . . . but I'm uncomfortable sharing a room with her. . . . At the beginning of the year, I couldn't sleep at night. You know, your stomach is just churning. I was just so upset. . . . I just feel on edge, like she's just waiting for my weak point.

The presence of the other teacher in the room served as a constant distraction and disruption for Cindy. It annoyed her that she could never have any time to herself.

She gets under my skin. . . . I felt like I was being stalked. . . . She eats her lunch during my fifth period class. In the room! . . . I know she's going to be there every freakin' day, eating her lunch and watching me, so I'm really careful. . . . She'll sit there, and whatever I put up on the

board, she scrutinizes it: “You spelled that wrong” or “That’s kind of hard to read.” . . . She would say things during my class. I would be saying something and she’d interject, “Oh, and don’t forget . . .” And it got to the point where that was making me so mad. I’m thinking, “Am I really so wrong that you need to be here?” She’s waiting for me to mess up, so I’m constantly afraid I’m going to. . . . I just wish she didn’t have to be in my room. . . . The days that she leaves, I’m just like free. I just feel free.

I was curious about what efforts either of them had made to address the issues that were causing Cindy so much grief. She said that when she did say something, the other teacher, in turn, had to find something about Cindy to criticize, so Cindy stopped saying anything.

Fred had been teaching Spanish for 28 years, 20 of them in his current district. He said that after many years of teaching without his own room, he had learned that “. . . In the first one or two days of class, you can see whether you’re going to be in a classroom with a sharer or a withholder.” He considered the math room to be the worst arrangement he had had to teach in, not only because he felt the room itself did not reflect his teaching philosophy, but because of how difficult the math teacher had been to work with.

When I entered the math room on the day I spent with Fred at school, the math teacher and his student teacher were still there, working at the computer. They were loudly discussing throughout Fred’s lesson. Fred said nothing to them. He later told me that it was too awkward to address another teacher in class in front of the students, so he just tried to ignore it and hoped it would soon end. Fred also complained that he had to supply his own chalk when teaching in that room because the math teacher hid it from him.

Fred also taught two classes each day in an English teacher’s room. The day I was there, Fred wanted me to notice that the blackboard had been covered with newsprint since his first class in that room, leaving only one small corner of the blackboard for him to use. “Did he consult me? Did it even occur to him to check with me? How does this impact students?”

Fred found that most colleagues expressed sympathy about his plight as a teacher without a room of his own, but that ultimately, “Nobody really gives a s*** that you don’t have a classroom as long as they do. That’s really what it’s about: ‘As long as I have my room.’”

Frieda had been an English teacher for almost 30 years, 17 of them in her current district. She described sharing a room as a “very hostile” arrangement. She often taught in classrooms that were not arranged in a manner she found conducive to her style of teaching. Worse than that, she said, some teachers would not even give her access to all the resources there. Frieda shared one such incident when she had asked if she could leave something up on the blackboard.

It was one of those situations like . . . “Can you give me some kind of guidelines? How am I supposed to know what I need to leave and what I can erase?” Now I use one section of the board, it’s about 2’ x 3’. . . . I have an easel that I put my stuff on so that she has the blackboard.

Even though Frieda was critical of how her colleagues treated her when she taught in their classrooms, when the roles were reversed and Frieda had a room of her own that other teachers taught in, she treated them the same way; she blamed and accused them for not respecting *her* space and materials. She was particularly critical of the French and Spanish teachers.

When the French teacher shared my room, I came up with a lot of things missing, and they would later appear. . . . All of a sudden, I realized [my stickers] were showing up on the homework he was handing back to his students. . . . He walked around with my ruler with his stuff for weeks. . . . When I shared [my room] with the Spanish teacher, there was a lot of damage done. I had a lot of stuff that was broken that I had to replace. . . . It finally got to the point that, one day when she came in, I had filled her chair with stuff she needed to take home. This was in May. It included the pan that she had cooked enchiladas in January and never cleaned out.

Frieda admitted that she was so angry about having to share what used to be her room with another teacher that she wanted the other teacher to feel uncomfortable there: “She is beginning to feel guilty. I hope so anyway so she feels uncomfortable in my space.”

Nancy was in her very first year of teaching (this was a second career for her), and she was not yet certified to teach French. She had a particularly strained relationship with the teacher with whom she shared a room for most of the day. She attributed it to the fact that the room had been the other teacher’s room long before Nancy even came to the school.

I’m not in a comfortable situation to dialogue with the other teacher about how we can share. . . . At the beginning of the year, we had a suggestion or agreement about the bulletin board space, but then, again, we don’t have a good dialogue with each other. . . . We’re not really talking to each other about stuff. It’s just kind of weird.

The day I spent in school with Nancy, I noticed that they did not speak to each other during their common planning time—they did not so much as greet each other. They barely acknowledged each other’s existence.

Nancy said that she had tried to collaborate with other teachers whose rooms she had taught in to see how they might integrate their lessons. She had asked them whether there was anything they were doing that she could tie into her French lessons. She gave up because she was always met with resistance or reluctance, or what she perceived to be their inability to even consider doing something together.

Patty had been teaching English for 22 years, 17 of them in her current district. Earlier in her teaching career, she had experienced teaching in different rooms throughout the school day. She learned that teachers do not usually make a point to discuss the use of the room with each other probably because those teachers did not like that she was there at all. She said she had “learned to share and learned to cooperate, and learned to give

and take because in a small school you always have to.” She said she had tried to be accommodating to teachers who now come into her room to teach because “You want to get along with people. . . . You just act like adults and try not to be crabby about it.” Nonetheless, Patty did have expectations of teachers who taught in her room.

When people come in and use it, you like them to leave it. . . . It’s like camping: “Take your garbage out when you go.” You’d like them to leave it the way they found it.

Still, when Patty learned one year that she was going to be sharing a room with another teacher, she intentionally opted not to consult with the other teacher about negotiating the use of the space. Instead, she made a point to get into the school before the year began: “I was there first—squatting rights—and I would take things: ‘These things look right for my groups, and you can have the rest.’ When the school year began, they “pussy-footed around each.”

Sally was certified to teach both social studies and English. She had been teaching for 10 years, 3 of them in her current district as a social studies teacher. When she was first hired to teach in the school where I interviewed her, she was assigned to a room where the health teacher also taught. She wanted to clarify that they shared the room *with each other*. It was not that one of them shared it with the other, or that it was one teacher’s room and the other teacher “borrowed” it. Sally immediately addressed the issue with her about how they were going to share the space.

When we first met, I said, “Is that the side of the room you like?” She said, “Yeah, I’ve always used that side of the room.” I said, “That’s fine with me. That’s fine.” We just divvied up the bulletin boards and so forth.

Tom had been teaching English for 13 years. He had just changed districts and had his own classroom. He had taught for many years without his own classroom and found it awkward or uncomfortable sharing with other teachers.

I was once assigned a room, and the teacher wouldn’t leave when I taught in there. Not only would he not leave, he would make noise, walk around, walk in front of me when I was trying to teach, put papers together and bang them on the desk, as if you’re straightening out the pile, talk to my students when I was trying to teach, interrupt me, and tell jokes—all kinds of stuff. The message was clear: “I don’t want you in here, and I’m hoping that you’ll complain to the administration.”

When Tom finally did get his own classroom, he said he felt sorry for the teacher who taught one class a day there. He found that they were “bending over backwards to be deferential to each other,” and every time she came into the room he felt sorry for her. He had tried to learn from his prior experiences as a teacher without his own room.

“Tell me what you need. I’ll have the room the way you want it when I leave; the board erased or whatever you want. And I’ll go out before your

class starts and come in after the bell rings when your students are leaving. It's your space for 43+ minutes." That seems to be the only fair thing that I can do for her.

Classroom Management

Nothing seemed to strain the relationships between the teachers more than disagreements or misperceptions about classroom management. Cindy's disagreement with and disapproval of the other teacher's classroom management greatly contributed to their strained relationship.

Her students are out of control, but this is my room, too, so I have to come in and pick up all the junk off the floor, and there's stuff all over the desks. Not that my students are perfect, but I say, "Pick up the floor. I'm not leaving it for the next class," where she doesn't really do that for me. . . . And, you know, they don't take care of things the way I would like things to be taken care of.

At the beginning of the year, the math teacher had remained in the room while Fred taught his Spanish class there, "observing" him, as Fred described it, making sure that Fred had "control over the classroom." Fred found that the other teachers ". . . never entertained the possibility that their students had done it. If there was anything out of order in the room, it had to be my students. . . ."

Because he was blamed for everything from paper being on the floor to students' writing on desk tops, he found that he was hesitant to consider incorporating certain activities into his teaching for fear that his colleagues would be angry with him.

Is the math teacher gonna react comfortably when you bring in a crockpot full of Mexican food and have loud boogie music the first day of class to welcome everyone and give them a Spanish name? I don't think so! They'll be complaining about the spilled chopped meat on the floor, and the English teacher will slam the door because you've had the music too loud.

When Frieda taught in other teachers' classrooms, her biggest complaint was that her colleagues often blamed her for not respecting their rooms and accused her and her students whenever something was amiss.

"Your students drew on my desk." "You have kids in here all day—how do you know it was one of my kids?" "Well, I check the desk after every class." She was just constantly, constantly berating me.

Yet when Frieda had her own room, she blamed other teachers who taught there and accused them of poor classroom management. She was most critical of the Spanish teacher:

[T]he kids would be all over the place. . . . I'm not used to this bedlam, and I mean they were all over the place. I asked one time, "How can you teach in that kind of an atmosphere?" She didn't have an answer for me. She really couldn't answer it.

Like other teachers in this study, Nancy felt that she and her students were under a microscope when she had a class in the other teacher's room.

We've had areas of disagreement about the idea that students were infringing on the teacher's space when she wasn't in the room. She has felt that students have messed with her stuff, and I've felt like students have messed with my stuff when I wasn't in the room. So now I don't touch anything, do not go near anything. . . . That's like a weird thing to have in a room when you know there's stuff you can't even breathe on, and that's really my sense. I don't want anyone going anywhere near anything because I don't want to be blamed for stuff happening.

Whereas these "traveling" teachers felt they were unjustly accused of disrespecting the "resident" teachers' rooms, Anita was critical of the teachers whose rooms she taught in. She thought she made every effort to accommodate the other teachers, but she did not feel they were as respectful of her rights as she was of theirs.

The rooms I've gone into have been atrociously a mess. . . . If that were my own room, those desks would be cleaned out at the end of the day. I wouldn't leave them that way.

What can we learn from these teachers?

I have focused in this article on the issues related to the teachers' relationships with each other and how sharing rooms and not having one's own room affected those relationships.

When asked what her advice would be to other teachers who share rooms, Anita was quick to offer, "Don't interrupt! Don't interfere!" She said that it was "a pain in the neck" when people would interrupt because they were looking for the teacher whose room it was. Ultimately, Anita recognized that "You're really depending on other people to be helpful to you. Some people are and some people aren't. . . . You gotta share, and you gotta be flexible."

Fred's primary interpretation of the issue was that teachers thought their responsibilities did not extend beyond what happened between them and their students in their own classrooms. He had also learned that teachers do not know how to share and argued that if everyone can't have a room of his or her own, then "it would be more equal if everybody would have to share rooms." That way, "people would learn to share." Otherwise, "the only teachers who are going to worry about lack of rooms are those people who don't have rooms."

When the other teacher would eat lunch in the classroom while Cindy was teaching, why did she feel she could not ask her to stop? When the other teacher

interjected comments during Cindy's lessons, why couldn't she let her know how much that bothered her?

The teachers in this study often felt ill-equipped to address the challenges to their collegial relationships caused by the sharing of space, and they usually avoided addressing the issue altogether. They shared a common reluctance to speak out at their schools about the difficulties they experienced without their own rooms for fear of being labeled a "complainer."

Does that label stem from the perceiver's unwillingness to even deem their colleagues' experiences as worthy of consideration? Or do they fear they might have to change or even give up their own rooms in order to improve the lives of their teaching colleagues? Why don't teachers help each other out? Whose responsibility is it to address this issue of which teachers get their own rooms and which ones do not?

The teachers in this study believed that decisions about who gets their own rooms were the result of policies beyond their control; e.g., state mandates, technology upgrades, capital projects, and increasingly diverse student needs. They were unanimous in their belief that the relationship between these policies and the practice of having one's own room needed to be addressed and changed. They were also in agreement that decisions about which teachers got rooms of their own were made for the wrong reasons. They did not, however, agree on whose responsibility it was to address the issue. Some saw the responsibility as lying in the hands of administrators, some recognized it as a role that teachers needed to assume, and some saw it as an issue that college educators of teachers and administrators needed to address.

Fred thought that teachers needed to change the way they thought about their relationship with classroom space. He argued that rather than thinking in terms of a room of one's own, we should appreciate that "a classroom belongs to the system, not the individual." Though he chuckled when he said there would be a massive call-in by teachers taking sick days if administrators asked them to work together to assign and share classrooms, he was nonetheless dismayed that because of their reluctance to participate in the process, "The existing system would be perpetuated."

Anita largely considered this issue of allocating rooms to be related to the traditional role of the school administrator, but she was willing to consider a school where teachers would work together to make those decisions. Since high school is subject-oriented, she envisioned having a central area that would not only foster more sharing of techniques among teachers but also foster more departmental decision making.

The teachers in this study were unanimous that the problems associated with not having their own rooms were exacerbated when the rooms they taught in did not even belong to their own department. Cindy thought we should

. . . change how we're thinking about it from the beginning, and maybe even utilize that to the good. Instead of just, "Oh, this is your desk space," maybe somehow they need to revise scheduling. . . . So you're sharing a room, and you're sharing students. Maybe we need to do that more.

If schools did not have enough rooms for every teacher to have his or her own room, Cindy argued that at least the teachers who share rooms should teach within the

same subject area. As a social studies teacher, she thought it would make more sense for her to share with the American history teacher next door instead of with the English teacher.

Some of the teachers in this study situated this issue clearly in the office of school administrators, who, they said, had very little involvement with what was really going on in their schools. They echoed the opinions of the teachers in Johnson's (1990) study, one of whom explained, "I just don't see people in administration boasting about the same kinds of goals that I have. I see them as people who are interested primarily in organization and in accountability" (p. 54). The teachers in this study asserted that not having "the same kinds of goals" led to administrators' lack of appreciation for the importance to teachers of having their own rooms.

Fred shared a story of a pre-service teacher from a local college who arrived one day to shadow him. She was taking a methods course and had specific things to look for and respond to after shadowing Fred for the day. One of the items on her list was "How is the room decorated?" He said he had to explain to her that she was making a huge assumption that he even had a room of his own that he could decorate. After her second and final day of shadowing Fred, she brought him a decoration that she had made for him to put up in his classroom. Fred was insulted: "She just didn't get it! What does that say about what the college is teaching them about what school is really like?"

Several months after I had interviewed and spent time at school with Anita, she sent me an e-mail message announcing that she was once again teaching in one room all day, and she was "lovin' it!" She described it as "much less stressful" because she did not have to worry about leaving things behind, and she could arrange the room the way she wanted. About a month after I received Anita's e-mail, I ran into her in town one day. She clarified for me that she did not really have a room of her own because two other teachers had classes in her room as well. "So, now the shoe's on the other foot," I said, "What did you learn last year that helps you share the room with those teachers this year? What kind of help and advice have you offered them?"

Much to my surprise, Anita complained about how disrespectful she thought the other teachers were to her room and her things. I reminded her of how she had made that same complaint during our interviews when the roles were reversed. She quickly defended herself by adding, "They leave the room a mess, and their kids are out of control. I never did that!"

I had hoped to hear about how she was working with the other teachers to negotiate the use of the room, and how they were helping each other out. I was disappointed when, instead, she could only find fault with them and their students. She was accusing them of the very same things she thought teachers had unjustly accused her of the previous year.

As I listened to Anita complain about the teachers who were sharing her classroom, I was saddened to be reminded of Freire's (1994) argument that it is human nature for the oppressed to become the oppressor once they are in a position of power. How quickly Anita had forgotten the difficulties she had encountered the previous year, the criticism she had received about the teachers in whose rooms she taught, and the complaints she thought they had about her. Why was she not able to learn from that experience and help her future colleagues who found themselves in the same situation? How can we prevent that from happening?

Conclusion

Through her research, Little (1990) discovered that advocates of collaboration have an “expectation that any interaction that breaks the isolation of teachers will contribute in some fashion to the knowledge, skill, judgment, or commitment that individuals bring to their work.” In fact, what Little found was that the “assumed link between increased collegial contact and improvement-oriented change does not seem to be warranted” (p. 509). She argues that “the most common configurations of teacher-to-teacher interaction may do more to bolster isolation than to diminish it” (p. 511). Just because teachers have occasion to come into contact with one another does not mean that they will collaborate, nor does it eliminate teacher isolation. Indeed, Hill (1995) found that

Collaborative norms tend to develop when circumstances are tailored to promote their practice. Secondary schools, however, operate in ways that make collegial sharing difficult. (p. 128)

In order for administrators, policy makers, and teacher educators to fully appreciate the importance of dealing with this issue, Fred extended an invitation to them to experience what it is like for him to teach without his own room.

I think all administrators and all superintendents and all university personnel . . . should have to come and spend not only two or three days in my shoes, but they should have to share their space the way that I have to share mine. . . . I invite them all to watch *Cider House Rules* because the people making the rules are not the people in the cider house, and I think that talking about this issue of classroom/no classroom . . . is something that has to happen through the system. . . . It has to happen with everyone talking about it, and then having the courage to do something about it.

School leaders can play a key role in nurturing collaborative relationships when circumstances require more than one teacher to use the same classroom by including teachers in that decision-making process. As the teachers in this study demonstrated, they have first-hand knowledge of how space is allocated in the school. By including everyone in the decision about how space is going to be allocated in the school, administrators are also laying the groundwork for cultivation of a whole school identity and community. Just as Fred had observed that the only people concerned about the inequitable room assignments were the teachers who did not have rooms of their own, the sharing of rooms should be everyone’s concern, not just the problem of an unfortunate few.

Hill (1995) found that “democratic decision making” could turn “a potential disaster into a new opportunity for collaborative growth” (p. 131). What is evident from this study is that teachers do not possess a framework for working professionally with their colleagues. Teachers have to give up the notion that they can close the door to their rooms and work as independent contractors.

When teachers share in the responsibility of making decisions about issues that matter to them—issues such as allocating limited classrooms to teachers—their relationships with each other will become intentional, not accidental. Decisions that affect teachers should not be made without including all of them in that process. Collaboration should be intentional, built around making decisions about issues that matter to teachers.

Johnson (1990) found that it takes more than simply allocating a common meeting time to foster meaningful collaboration among teachers because that time is often used to serve “a different set of purposes than those that mattered to them” (p. 175). Imagine teachers using this time to make decisions about which teachers get which rooms! The conversation surrounding that decision could cause teachers to learn more about each other’s curriculum, instructional styles, and philosophies of teaching and learning. By working together to determine the best plan for use of limited classrooms and presenting it to their administrators, teachers could become decision *sharers*.

Glickman (1998) strongly advocated for restructuring the way decisions are made in schools and supported his argument with two reasons that “Teachers should have the majority say in teaching matters.”

The first reason is that decisions about teaching and learning affect teachers the most; they, more than anyone else in a school or district, must live with the consequences of those decisions in their day-to-day lives.

The second reason is that teachers know more about teaching, potential changes, and likely consequences for students than anyone else does. (p. 137)

Even if no teacher could have a room of his or her own, collegiality and colleagueship probably would not naturally develop; it takes practice. Encouraging and supporting teachers to collaborate with each other about which teachers get rooms of their own—indeed, if any do, preparing and nurturing administrators to challenge them to discover new ways of addressing that issue, and tightening the relationship between teacher education programs and schools could demonstrate that respecting what matters to teachers fosters and sustains school improvement. Deciding which teachers get which rooms seems to have been treated as something that does not—or should not—matter to teachers. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. By honoring what matters to teachers, and by valuing their decisions about those matters, schools could become what Ross (1992) calls “self-critical communities of teachers” (p. 179).

Through their frank and candid descriptions of life without rooms of their own, the teachers in this study have proven Eisner’s (1994) argument that often what matters the most is what is given the least attention. By reversing that practice, this study has opened the door to understanding what matters most to teachers so that we can make schools better places for everyone.

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