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Unlocking Cross-Divisional Sharing: A Multiple-Case Study of Vertical Collaboration in Independent Schools

Wade A. Hanse
Georgia State University

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The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

_____
Gregory Middleton, Ph.D.
Committee Chair

_____
Nicholas J. Sauers, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Sheryl Cowart Moss, Ph.D.
Committee Member

_____
Date

_____
Jennifer Esposito, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Department of Educational Policy Studies

_____
Paul A. Alberto, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Education & Human Development

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of this dissertation is:

Wade Austin Hanse
3968 Blustery Way NE
Marietta, GA 30066

The director of this dissertation is:

Gregory Middleton, Ph.D.
Department of Educational Policy Studies
College of Education & Human Development
Georgia State University
Atlanta, GA 30303

CURRICULUM VITAE

Wade A. Hanse

ADDRESS: 3968 Blustery Way NE
                                  Marietta, GA 30066

EDUCATION:

Ed.D.	2021	Georgia State University	Educational Policy Studies
M.S.	2016	Georgia State University	Educational Policy Studies
B.S.	2009	Georgia Southern University	Middle Grades Education

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

2019-present	STEAM Coordinator St. Martin's Episcopal School
2011-2019	Elementary Science teacher St. Martin's Episcopal School

UNLOCKING CROSS-DIVISIONAL SHARING: A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF

VERTICAL COLLABORATION IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

by

WADE A. HANSE

Under the Direction of Gregory Middleton, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Cross-divisional collaboration represents a specialized form of vertical sharing occurring when school personnel discuss issues of teaching and learning with their peers across traditional divisional boundaries (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school). Recent empirical evidence highlighted the benefits of cross-divisional collaboration, asserting the practice could deepen educators' understandings of curricula, strengthen students' overall academic bases, and even build respect between cross-divisional colleagues. Unfortunately, due to scheduling and physical site limitations, the previous works announcing cross-divisional collaboration's potential relied on external interventions to facilitate peer interactions, leaving it largely unexplained how school leaders could implement and sustain this specific form of sharing. As flexible organizations

frequently situating multiple divisions on a single campus site, K-12 independent schools offered an ideal arena for this study to build on the extant literature and examine the mechanisms and benefits of cross-divisional collaboration in their real-world contexts. Specifically, leveraging social capital theory and distributed leadership theory, this work carried out a multiple-case study involving formal and informal leaders at two independent schools identified as exemplars of cross-divisional practice. To begin addressing the recognized gap in the literature, this investigation collected interview, document, and field note data, to reveal how independent school leaders sustained cross-divisional collaboration. Due to a lack of existing research involving K-12 independent schools, this work also explored the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional practice within these unique educational organizations. Resulting from a cross-case synthesis between this study's two site schools, the findings supported addressing barriers, establishing a constructive culture, and investing in relationships as essential leadership activities related to the facilitation of cross-divisional collaboration. Furthermore, the participants in this work indicated their school's cross-divisional practice led to deeper connection and meaningful improvement in their school communities. In addition to informing independent school practitioners, these results begin to address the previous gap in the literature and serve to inform future works.

INDEX WORDS: Vertical collaboration, Cross-divisional collaboration, Collaboration, Independent schools, Distributed leadership

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DEDICATION

To my wife and son, you bring so much joy and wonder to my life. Thank you for all of the

laughter, smiles, and encouragement. With a full heart and love, I dedicate this work to you both.

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To my friends and family, thank you for your patience, your understanding, and your periodic reminders to do all things in moderation, including moderation.

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Introduction

Over the last several decades, policymakers, politicians, and business executives became increasingly involved in the K-12 education arena (Henig, 2009, 2013). Previously silent corporations began calling for a more prepared pool of candidates, proficient in skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and technology (Bruett, 2006). As consequence of these external pressures, the roles of educational leaders and teachers expanded rapidly beyond content knowledge and management to include the cultivation of innovation, cultural awareness, and communication skills (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015).

In response to the swell of requisite capacities in contemporary K-12 education and due to the shortcomings of traditional top-down development, a shift in professional learning is underway in education (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) expanded on the transformation of professional development, declaring, "To help young people learn the more complex skills of the 21st century…education systems must offer more effective professional learning than has traditionally been available" (p. 46). A core practice of this modernized development framework is the consequential collaboration between educators.

As a crucial aspect of organizational learning and school reform, educational researchers understandably gave a substantial amount of attention to peer-collaboration (Klar & Brewer, 2013; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). Both in the United States and abroad, studies established how earnest sharing between school faculty members increased both self- and collective-efficacies (Sehgal et al., 2017; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017), improved teacher job

satisfaction (Banerjee et al., 2017), and perhaps most importantly, positively impacted student achievement (Hipp et al., 2008; Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

In the United States, collaborative teams tend to group naturally by grade-level or subject area (Spillane & Shirrell, 2017; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018), with conversations centering on existing students and teaching practices (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). While the body of knowledge contains a substantial amount of research devoted to teacher teams focused on their current students, a much smaller amount of research has been dedicated to schools' practices of cross-divisional, vertical collaboration.

Vertical collaboration involves teachers working together across grade-levels and even divisional (i.e., middle school and high school) lines to assess teaching and learning from a more longitudinal perspective (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015). Contemporary research on vertical collaboration structures between educators yielded promising outcomes, especially around curricular understanding and school culture (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019). Unfortunately, the crowded rigor of traditional school schedules (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015) makes implementing this form of sharing incredibly challenging. Consequently, much of the previous research involving cross-divisional collaboration either relied on extraneous resources to purchase substitutes (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015) or asked participants to volunteer personal time and meet offsite, outside of regular school hours (Trabona et al., 2019). The present study attempts to build off this small body of cross-divisional collaboration research, seeking to better understand how the practice can be implemented and sustained in schools. Regardless of its form, effective collaboration within organizations fundamentally relies on the theoretical concept of social capital and an individual's willingness to serve the greater good.

While many iterations of social capital theory exist, each tends to fit into one of two major theoretical categories (Borgatti et al., 2009). The first branch views social capital as a consequence of group membership, such as belonging to a privileged social-class (see, Bourdieu, 1987). Through this understanding, social capital represents the "actual or potential resources that are linked…a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships" (Bourdieu, 1986, p 248). Conversely, other scholars theorize social capital as the sum of resources an individual might access through his or her specific network of relationships.

This second understanding of capital was relied upon to frame the benefits of collaboration for this study, and while others promote a similarly individualized approach (see, Burt, 2005), this project leaned on Lin's (2001) theoretical definition. According to Lin, social capital "should be defined as resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions" (Lin, 2001, p. 29). For clarity, each element of Lin's definition and its significance is briefly discussed in relation to the current research project (Lin, 1999).

Within the context of school organizations, the curricular and pedagogic knowledge possessed by individual administrators and teachers represents the embedded resources in Lin's (2001) definition. These resources are then "mobilized" through the peer-relationships and sharing taking place within the organization. Finally, it is Lin's (2001) action-orientation, which crucially ties teachers' resources and collaboration to enhanced practice and professional growth. In this collegial structure, the activity of leadership functions fluidly, as colleagues flow in and out of leader and learner roles (Stoll et al., 2006). To interpret the nature of relationships within a school network of learning and growth, this work adopted a distributed leadership lens.

As a leadership theory in education, distributed leadership experienced a meteoric rise in popularity (Mayrowetz, 2008) after its introduction by Gronn (2000) and Spillane (2006). Gronn

has since amended his theoretical position on leadership from a shared activity to more of a continuum of singular and shared practice (Gronn, 2008). Though Spillane's (2006) theory has come under some critique (Hargreaves & Fink, 2008; Lumby, 2019), unlike Gronn, Spillane's perspective has remained largely unchanged. According to Spillane and others (2001), "leadership involves the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning" (p. 24). This theoretical perspective does not discount the role of formal leaders, but rather "stretches" the activity of leadership across the entire organization, involving several actors and social constructs (Spillane et al., 2001). Leveraging social capital theory (Lin, 2001) and distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006) as lenses to view the activity of leadership and collegial sharing, the present work sought to extend on the present body of collaboration literature by exploring school leaders' roles in fostering cross-divisional collaboration.

An interestingly favorable educational arena to explore the structures of vertical collaboration is independent schools. Independent schools are governed by a board of trustees, not a public school board (National Association of Independent Schools [NAIS], n.d.), are free to adapt and set their curricula as they see fit (Baker et al., 2016), and are mostly unrestrained by state mandates (Schuermann & McGovern, 2016). In addition to their agile governance structures, a significant percentage of independent schools situate multiple divisions on a single campus (Southern Association of Independent Schools [SAIS], 2020), escalating the possibility for cross-divisional sharing during the regular school day.

According to the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) (2020), the average enrollment of independent schools in the United States is 470 students, with just over 30 percent of students nationwide identifying as a person of color. As institutions, independent

schools are largely reliant on tuition to meet their fiscal needs (Baker et al., 2016; NAIS, n.d.). For a traditional day school, NAIS reports the median tuition for an independent school in the United States is roughly $28,000. Additionally, of the nearly 600,000 students enrolled in NAIS member schools, approximately 27 percent receive some form of financial assistance from their school with the median grant representing a gift of just over $19,000 (NAIS, 2020).

Like other sectors of education, the landscape of independent schooling experienced a shift in recent years. Following the economic recession of 2008 (Schuermann & McGovern, 2016) and the increasing market pressures from school choice policies in the public sector (Baker et al., 2016; Egalite & Wolf, 2016; NAIS, 2015), many independent schools were forced to re-think their identity and academic programming. Along with recommendations focused on financial security and human resource strategies (NAIS, 2015, 2016, 2017), national independent school organizations and researchers suggested, in order to evolve, independent schools should pursue innovative strategies to develop their teachers (Balossi & Hernandez, 2016; NAIS 2016), identify their school's niche and what makes them unique (NAIS, 2005, 2015), add diversity to their student bodies (NAIS, 2005), and expand academic opportunities for 21st century learning (NAIS, 2015).

For independent schools wishing to effectively meet these contemporary challenges, vertical collaboration offers a promising solution (NAIS, 2015). The researched benefits of cross-divisional collaboration, such as increased curricular understanding and the use of effective learning strategies (Birkhead et al., 2017; Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019) can help independent schools either directly adapt to their shifting realities (e.g., teacher development and academic opportunities) or significantly support related initiatives (e.g., meeting the needs of a more diverse student population). Even though independent schools

have flatter governance structures (Schuermann & McGovern, 2016) and their campuses often include multiple divisions on a single site (SAIS, 2020), very little, if any, research exists on how independent schools practice cross-divisional collaboration. Additionally, it is unknown whether independent school organizations perceive the same benefits of vertical collaboration as those emergent in previous studies involving public educators.

As such, the present study aimed to provide knowledge to help address this gap in the literature on vertical collaboration and independent schools. Specifically, with guidance from experts within the independent school community, this research identified two independent school organizations, each practicing cross-divisional sharing at an exemplary level, and focused on identifying the leadership activities which supported the schools' cross-divisional, collaborative practices. As a secondary focus, this study also investigated the benefits of cross-divisional interactions perceived by both participant-school communities.

Guiding Questions

The following research questions were used to help guide the process of inquiry during the study:

1. How do independent schools, identified as exemplars, practice cross-divisional collaboration?

    1a. What actions do formal, administrative leaders execute in promoting cross-divisional collaboration within independent schools?

    1b. What actions do non-administrative, or informal faculty leaders perform as a part of fostering cross-divisional collaboration in independent schools?

2. What are the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration in independent school communities?

Definition of Terms

Collaboration: interdependent sharing between educators with the purpose of impacting practice, leading to better results for their students, for their team, and for their school (DuFour & DuFour, 2010).

Cross-Divisional Collaboration: formal or informal collaborative sharing between teachers or staff of differing grade-level divisions. For example, collaboration between middle school and elementary school teachers.

Division Head: Division heads are analogous to principals in public schools. In this study, the terms division head and principal are used interchangeably to describe the leaders of an independent school division.

Formal Leader: A person formally designated by their professional title as the head of school, principal or division head, assistant principal, or dean.

Head of School: the head of school is the highest individual leadership position within an independent school organization, answering only to the board of trustees. A head of school is responsible for the vision and resource distribution of an independent school.

Independent School: educational institutions primarily funded by tuition payments and charitable contributions rather than public funds. These schools are governed by a board of trustees, not a public school board (NAIS, n.d.).

Informal Leader: Faculty members outside the head of school, principal or division head, assistant principal, or dean roles who influence the school community to improve professional and instructional practices.

Literature Review

In considering the body of research, this literature review aspired to the following goals: 1) specify and interpret the practices and benefits of collaboration between peers in K-12 school organizations, 2) recognize the relationships and leadership activities which encourage collaborative school environments, and 3) identify how these general collaboration concepts relate more specifically to cross-divisional forms of sharing within an independent school context. Given the popularity and broad array of collaboration studies throughout the educational literature, it was critical to root this review in the theoretical perspectives of the current research. As such, the empirical works relied upon were studies primarily centered on formal and informal leadership and the phenomena of professional learning communities, collaborative school reform, and school-based social networks.

Defining Collaboration

A great deal of collaboration research presented in the literature utilized professional learning community (PLC) schools (Hipp et al., 2008; Stoll et al., 2006; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018) or the actions related to PLCs (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017) as a foundation for studying the effectiveness of teacher sharing. Unfortunately, as is often the case with educational reform initiatives, "the term [PLC] has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning" (DuFour, 2004, p. 6). Thus, this review first provides an understanding of PLCs before specifically addressing collaboration.

Several definitions of PLC were existent across the literature, each with slight variation. Generally, however, the common attributes of PLCs included shared vision, shared responsibility, deprivatization of practice, supportive and shared leadership, and collaboration between peers (Hipp et al., 2008; Hord, 1997; Stoll et al., 2006). In essence, a professional

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learning community is "an *ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve"* (DuFour & DuFour, 2010). As will be made clear in the next section, collaboration is such a foundational component of PLCs that several meaningful overlaps in leadership, action, and purpose between PLCs and earnest sharing emerged from the literature.

Much like PLC, collaboration is a term and practice which endured a wide variance of nuanced differences in its definition throughout the extant literature. The following section explores several proposed meanings of collaboration from both organizational and educational research and then makes explicit the definition relied upon for the present study.

From the organizational theory literature, Bolman and Deal (2017) understood collaboration in terms of lateral coordination intended to "keep top-down control from stifling initiative and creativity" (p. 60). The authors explained, lateral coordination involves collegial sharing through both formal and informal means to meet the communicated goals of an organization. However, a drawback of this definition was its failure to differentiate collaboration from lesser forms of professional interactions, such as helping or cooperation.

Hord (1986), helped characterize collaboration apart from other peer exchanges in her synthesis of organizational literature, claiming cooperation and collaboration could be distinguished from one another in three key ways. First, collaboration consists of a joint venture, while cooperation exists in the space of concession. Secondly, cooperation involves sporadic exchanges of one-way information, whereas collaboration occurs regularly and includes multidirectional communication. Lastly, collaboration involves all participants contributing resources such as time and capabilities, leading all parties to share a sense of ownership in the outcomes. In contrast, cooperation maintains single-sided ownership with resource exchanges

more reflecting a buyer-seller arrangement. Based on these distinctions, Hord (1986) concluded that collaboration in an organizational setting involved regular and mutual planning, resource-sharing, implementation, and evaluation between parties. This definition added clarity for the present research by characterizing collaboration apart from general acquiescence between organizational partners. Yet, to maximize the coherence for the present study, it was still necessary to contextualize collaboration within a school setting.

Hart (1998) presented an ideal entry point for defining collaboration in school organizations, explaining, "At its best, collaboration [in schools] facilitates the education of children and youth, enabling educators to have access to expanded knowledge, resources, and creative alternatives for action" (Hart, 1998, p. 90). In the same work, Hart (1998) declared collaboration occurs through mutual *cooperation* between equals. As a point of comparison, Hord (1997) also offered a succinct definition of collaboration within an educational setting, stating, "Faculty call on one another to discuss the development of practice and process skills related to the implementation of practice" (Hord, 1997, p. 14). In line with her previous work, Hord continued to explain that this form of collegial sharing should be an ongoing process and result in the implementation of new pedagogic strategies. Each of the two definitions presented above was found to contain critical gaps for the present study.

First, Harts's conceptualization of collaboration addressed specific desired outcomes, including the necessity of academic change and action. However, in describing collaborative interaction, Hart (1998) pulled the definition dangerously towards cooperation, adding ambiguity rather than clarity. Second, it has been said that "Collaboration is a means to an end, not the end itself" (DuFour & DuFour, 2010), and Hord's (1997) explanation of collaboration failed to

sufficiently address collaboration's expected outcomes. Therefore, this study turned to DuFour and DuFour (2010) to explicitly define collaboration.

According to DuFour and DuFour (2010), "*collaboration* represents a systematic process in which teachers work together interdependently in order to *impact* their classroom practice in ways that will lead to better results for their students, for their team, and for their school" (p. 12). DuFour and DuFour's (2010) definition of collaboration accounted for the shortcomings of both Hart (1998) and Hord (1997) by distinguishing the term from other forms of collegiality and adequately addressing the intended outcomes of the collaboration between school faculty members. With an established understanding of how this work conceptualized collaboration, the subsequent sections present empirical evidence as to how and to what extent collaboration was shown to enhance teaching and learning.

Benefits of Collaborative Schools

This section of the literature review seeks to explicate the positive academic contributions of collaboration by drawing on relevant empirical works. First, the text examines *teacher practice* and *student achievement* as two closely related, yet discrete, benefits of collaboration. The attention then shifts, offering a theoretical explanation, in the form of teacher- and collective-efficacies, for *how* collaboration impacts the previously espoused school-level factors.

Collaboration and Teacher Practice

Due to the complexity of teacher-student relationships, researchers found it challenging to confidently measure teacher practice (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). In the literature, researchers attempted to capture and evaluate the consequences of collaboration on classroom practices in a variety of ways (Frank et al., 2011; Parise & Spillane, 2010; Sun et al., 2017; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). In their study of in-school relationships, trust, and teaching practices, Wahlstrom

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and Louis (2008) chose to measure *flexible grouping*, *focused instruction,* and *contemporary strategies* as variables of effective teaching practice. Other researchers utilized a combination of quantitative and qualitative measures to identify *shifts* in instructional approaches as a result of the collaboration between school faculty (Parise & Spillane, 2010; Sun et al., 2017). Realizing the high degree of variability in how researchers attempted to observe teacher practice in collaboration studies, identifying the patterns of agreement in the literature was vital.

In their analysis of survey data from over 4,000 teachers working in 138 schools, Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) found a positive correlation between effective teaching practices and the independent variables of *professional dialogue* and *shared practice.* Parise and Spillane (2010) conducted a mixed-methods analysis focused on changes in teacher practice and "on-the-job-learning" at 30 elementary schools. The researchers' findings acknowledged that collaboration between faculty peers appeared to be the most significant predictor of teachers trying new strategies in both language arts and mathematics. Frank et al. (2011) added to the pattern of favorable evidence between collaboration and instructional innovation. In their study, Frank and his colleagues (2011) sought to understand how professional knowledge crossed boundaries and expanded through organizations. The analysis of the data concluded that collaboration between colleagues was critical for instigating and sustaining innovation in the classroom (Frank et al., 2011). Finally, the concept of "teacher spillover" provided a methodologically different perspective for substantiating collegial sharing's effect on teacher practice.

Utilizing ten years of student and teacher data from the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Sun et al. (2017) endeavored to understand if the presence of a new, effective teacher appeared to impact the value of an overall teacher team. The researchers' analyses of the

quantitative data revealed a positive impact of effective transfer teachers on incumbent faculty. Importantly, new effective teachers were shown to have the most considerable influence on the least effective incumbent team members.

The findings from the above studies contribute to a pattern of support for collaboration's impact on classroom instruction. Nonetheless, as is the case with any school reform, researchers also sought to show a connection between faculty collaboration and student achievement.

Collaboration and Student Achievement

Learning, by its nature, is highly social and dynamic, and thus drawing a direct connection between any phenomenon and student achievement is far more complicated than showing gains in test scores. To account for these complexities, in the literature, researchers often *controlled* for confounding social variables such as race and socioeconomic status (Goddard et al., 2007; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Supovitz et al., 2003). Given the difficulty of claiming causal relationships between any single variable and learning, special attention was given to each study's sample and methods.

Goddard and colleagues (2007) investigated the relationship between an improvement focused collaboration initiative and student achievement across 47 elementary schools. The researchers collected survey data from over 450 teachers and achievement data from over 2,500 students. The researchers then conducted hierarchical linear modeling to analyze the data, controlling for each school's social context. The results indicated a moderate but significant relationship between teacher collaboration and student test scores in both reading and math. Specifically, Goddard et al. (2007) reported, "a one-standard-deviation increase in the extent to which teachers collaborated…was associated with a *.08 SD* increase in average school mathematics achievement and a *.07 SD* increase in average school reading achievement" (pp.

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889-890). Supovitz, Sirinides, and May (2010) took a similar approach to data collection for their study on peer influence, teaching, and learning, by collecting survey data from 721 math and language arts teachers in second- through eighth-grades. In line with Goddard et al. (2007), the multilevel modeling indicated a moderate gain in student achievement in language arts, but in the context of this study, no significant relationship was found for mathematics (Supovitz et al., 2010). In yet another study, Ronfeldt and others (2015), used data from over 9,000 participants to study if the *quality* of collaboration in schools influenced overall student achievement. Survey respondents answered questions about how often they practiced and how helpful they found collaboration. The findings illustrated schools with the highest levels of quality collaboration also had the greatest gains in student achievement. Additionally, teachers' *years of experience* were most predictive of achievement gains when their school reported high levels of collaboration (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Together the previous results establish a link between collaboration and academic benefits. However, to confirm this pattern, it was necessary to look into collaboration's purported impact across diverse school settings.

In an effort to disclose the progress of two schools' continued journeys implementing learning communities, Hipp and colleagues (2008) concurrently studied two socioeconomically and racially contrasting schools. One of the site school's populations was nearly 98 percent white, with only 26 percent of the students categorized as "economically disadvantaged." Conversely, the study's second site school was 87 percent Hispanic, and nearly 97 percent of the students qualified as economically disadvantaged. Even though the schools' populations were strikingly dissimilar, the researchers claimed, "the academic performance of both schools [was] high based on state mandated measures" (p. 191). The cross-case-analysis of the interview data revealed common practices in each school, such as collaboration, teamwork, and

professionalism, as possible explanations for the reported levels of achievement (Hipp et al., 2008). On a larger scale, Supovitz and others (2003) compared the implementation of learning community initiatives in Philadelphia and Cincinnati. Though each of the city's schools differed culturally and in their conceptualization of sharing, Supovitz et al. (2003) reported that in both cities, when peer conversation extended beyond superficial small talk and focused on instruction, significant gains in student learning were observed.

Taken as a whole, the studies presented in the above section provide a strong argument for validating collaboration's ability to strengthen teacher practice and student achievement. The primary question left unanswered is *why* collaboration appears to increase teacher effectiveness and student learning. Throughout the literature, researchers consistently supported efficacy as an explanation for these positive outcomes.

Collaboration and Efficacy

According to Bandura (1977), *efficacy* "is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (p. 193), or said more plainly, efficacy is a competency judgment. An individual's belief that he or she can, in fact, accomplish a given task does not guarantee a successful outcome. However, the higher a person's sense of efficacy, the more active and willing he or she will be in exerting the effort necessary to fulfill the desired results (Bandura, 1977). The opposite can also be held valid, in that the lower an individual's self-efficacy, the more likely he or she will be to give up based on the assertion that they are unable to accomplish the given task anyway.

In schools, faculty members form teacher- and collective-efficacy beliefs, the former referring to a teacher's evaluation of his or her personal competencies in the classroom and the latter representing one's confidence in the overall school to educate its student population

(Bandura, 1993). According to research presented by Bandura (1993), teachers who have higher self-efficacies tended to provide students with more mastery-oriented learning opportunities in the classroom, and schools with higher overall collective-efficacy promoted greater academic success.

In the previously cited study involving the implementation of learning communities in Cincinnati and Philadelphia, it was reported that focused collaboration led to gains in student achievement (Supovitz et al., 2003). Additionally, the data collected in this study indicated a positive relationship between faculty sharing and teacher-efficacy. Sehgal, Nambudiri, and Mishra (2017) provided another example linking collaboration and efficacy in their study involving 25 private schools throughout India. The data collected from 575 teachers and over 6,000 students pointed to a positive relationship between efficacy and effective teacher practice; one of the outcomes of collaboration supported in the review above. Finally, Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017) also reported an encouraging connection between collective-efficacy and forms of sharing in learning communities in their study of 16 California-based schools. The analysis of their survey data illustrated a strong and positive correlation between the variables *working collaboratively to define the quality of student work, meeting regularly to collaborate for improved student learning,* and a sense of collective-efficacy.

Bandura asserted an individual's efficacy in any given domain can be altered based on "four major sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states" (p. 194). This section illustrated a link between collaboration and increased teacher- and collective-efficacies. Furthermore, this section made clear the benefits of collaboration around teacher practice and student achievement. While it is hard to deny its benefits, collaboration as a meaningful practice does not occur naturally in

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schools. Collaborative relationships are challenging to maintain (Spillane & Shirrell, 2017), and the culture and structures necessary to maintain sharing take strong formal and informal leaders. In the succeeding section of this review, the structures, leadership, and relationships within collaborative schools are explored in detail.

Relationships, Trust, and Leadership

The literature has shown that collaboration *can* impact both teacher instruction and student learning, but if faculties do not engage in meaningful relationships, collaboration becomes a sterile illusion. Recall, from earlier, Lin's (2001) definition of social capital as the "*resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions*" (p. 29). In an organizational setting, the relationships which undergird collaboration exist in a dynamic network, shifting and growing as actors stimulate or constrain the flow of knowledge throughout the organization. The body of empirical works advances that both individual (Shirrell & Spillane, 2019; Spillane et al., 2015) and structural factors (Bridwell-Mitchell & Cooc, 2016; Hipp et al., 2008; Spillane et al., 2015) contribute to a social network's development in schools.

The term *homophily* "is the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people" (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 416). In school-based social networks, it has been argued and expected (Berebitsky et al., 2014; Spillane et al., 2015) that persons with similar individual characteristics such as race, age, gender, and years of experience would tend to cluster together. However, documented evidence indicated mixed results. As a part of studying faculty collaboration around the *Reading First* program in Michigan-based schools, Berebitsky and others (2014) found that teachers were more likely to collaborate with other teachers of the same race and gender. Results counter to those of

Berebitsky et al. (2014) were presented by Spillane and colleagues (2015) as one of their many findings from their research probing the nature of social networks within and between schools. In fact, the predictive modeling in their study yielded a negative correlation between anticipated faculty relationships and an individual's gender and years of experience (Spillane et al., 2015). While individual factors certainly warrant the attention of researchers, school structures such as grade-levels, committees, and formal teams have more consistently predicted collaboration patterns in school-based social networks.

In several studies involving collaboration and social capital, researchers pointed to formal school structures as significant requisites of professional dialogue between peers (Bridwell-Mitchell & Cooc, 2016; Hipp et al., 2008; Spillane et al., 2015). Spillane and Shirrell (2017) studied the *patterns* of collegial ties over a four-year period in 14 elementary schools. In their initial analysis of the data, the researchers found that over 60 percent of professional relationships dissolved from one year to the next. Even once the researchers removed all the faculty who left the district from their analysis, the researchers still reported a dissolution rate for professional relationships of over 50 percent from one year to the next (Spillane & Shirrell, 2017). The most significant reason bonds were broken, or stated in the positive, the most significant predictor of a sustained relationship was continued membership on a formal team, such as a grade-level or committee.

Feld's (1981) *focus theory* helps interpret the reported social patterns in these above studies. In general, focus theory explains that individuals tend to form personal relationships around specific foci, like organizational membership (Feld, 1981). Through this lens, relationships in school organizations, and as a consequence, collaboration, are likely to materialize around shared foci like a similar grade-level, subject, committee, or team. However,

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formal channels of sharing do not guarantee faculty will experience meaningful collaboration. Throughout the literature, relational trust was highlighted as the fuel ultimately driving productive collaboration between colleagues.

According to researchers, trust involves four key areas: respect (listening and valuing the views of others), personal regard (a willingness to go above and beyond), competence (ability to produce desired outcomes), and integrity (keeping your word) (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). In the context of collaboration, high levels of trust within a school organization, as measured by faculty perception, have been shown to increase teachers' willingness to share (Liou & Daly, 2014), bolster school change efforts (Bryk & Schneider, 2003), and improve the overall academic success of the school (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Hipp et al., 2008). Ultimately, the responsibility for establishing conditions of trust and ensuring a school culture idyllic for sharing falls to school leaders (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

In line with the leadership framework (Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane, 2006) of the present study, research indicated that formal and informal leaders played a significant part in carrying out the *activity* of leadership in collaborative schools (Stoll et al., 2006). Thus, this section sought to provide evidence from the literature as to how both formal and informal leaders impact trust, efficacy, and the practice of collaboration in their schools. For this research, formal leaders can be thought of as those holding head of school, principal, assistant principal, or dean roles, while informal leaders are considered any faculty members outside the above leadership designations (i.e., a teacher serving as math chair is regarded as an informal leader of the school).

According to Supovitz and colleagues (2010), formal leadership's most considerable influence on collaboration is through means of indirect support. Multiple studies indicated positive collaborative outcomes when principals set and communicated a clear vision (Kurland et

al., 2010; Moolenaar et al., 2010), modeled and practiced trusting relationships (Liou & Daly, 2014; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008), and encouraged their teachers to try new ideas (Berebitsky et al., 2014; Hipp et al., 2008). Additionally, Bandura (1993) reported that the quality of principal leadership practiced in schools had a positive impact on the school's overall sense of collective-efficacy. However, research suggests that even when formal leaders were committed to implementing a collaborative culture in their schools, the scope of their influence was somewhat insufficient in reaching the entire organization.

In their study of work-related social interactions, Shirrell and Spillane (2019) described leaders feeling isolated in their schools even though, on average, their physical location in the school was the closest in proximity to the rest of the faculty. This finding highlights the necessity to extend leadership around collaboration to informal, teacher-leaders capable of operationalizing the vision and culture conveyed by the school's formal leaders.

Informal or teacher leadership can be thought of as "the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of the school community to improve teacher and learning practices" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, pp. 287-288). In collaborative settings, studies showed that faculty members often take turns serving as leaders or followers based on the circumstances of the situation (Stoll et al., 2006). However, the literature also illustrated that certain individuals, either due to their distinguished experience or title as a coordinator, were viewed more permanently as informal leaders by their peers (Spillane et al., 2018).

No matter how informal leaders came to find themselves in positions of influence, the literature maintained a consistent message of their positive value to peer collaboration. Over and over, studies including either informal or distributed leadership as a predictive variable revealed

strong positive relationships between teacher-leader-activities and collaboration (Spillane et al., 2015; Supovitz et al., 2010; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). Supovitz et al. (2010) strikingly reported that informal peer influence explained a more significant portion of teacher practice than the principal's leadership. In fact, in math instruction, the researchers affirmed that informal leadership was nearly twice as influential to a teacher's practice as the principal's leadership (Supovitz et al., 2010).

To this point, the sum of this review should clarify collaboration as a valuable but complex phenomenon tied to several interactive social variables. In the final section of this literature review, the focus narrows to the more limited literature around vertical forms of collaboration.

Vertical Collaboration

Collaboration in schools often occurs in grade-level teams or curricular departments (Spillane & Shirrell, 2017; Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). Vertical collaboration, or more specifically, cross-divisional collaboration in this study, breaks away from these traditional models of sharing and asks teachers to form groups across divisional lines (e.g., a group with elementary, middle, and high school teachers) and discuss student learning from a more longitudinal perspective (Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015). The following section introduces vertical collaboration as an integral aspect of meaningful curricular articulation and analyzes select studies from the small body of literature directly focused on cross-divisional forms of vertical collaboration, paying close attention to its empirically supported benefits and its barriers.

Cross-Divisional Collaboration

More and more, schools are investing time and resources into articulating their curricula across both grade-level and divisional lines (Schmidt & Houang, 2012; Wise & Alt, 2005). In

order for these curricular reform efforts to have a significant impact on instruction and learning, research suggests schools must strategically elicit the investment of their faculty and administrators and, crucially, provide an opportunity for teachers to collaborate with cross-divisional peers (Tanenbaum et al., 2017).

Contemporary studies focused directly on the practice of cross-divisional collaboration have supplied encouraging evidence for its application in schools (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Handelzalts, 2019; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019). For example, Suh and Seshaiyer (2015) grouped six teachers ranging from third- through eighth-grade to investigate if the group's collaboration would impact its members' practices. The cross-divisional group first gathered together over the summer preceding the start of school and then met periodically throughout the academic year. The qualitative analysis of the data indicated, as a result of their collaboration, the teachers had a greater grasp of the overall content knowledge, they could more easily predict where students might have misunderstandings about the content, and they demonstrated an increased level of responsibility for their specific area of the curriculum (Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015).

Ciampa and Gallagher (2016) conducted a multi-case analysis of elementary and secondary teachers in Ontario, Canada. In this study, the researchers focused on literacy instruction and collaboration between Grade 8 and Grade 9 teachers; the transition years from elementary to secondary school in Canada. With some assistance securing common planning times, over the course of the study, teachers discovered inconsistencies in the academic language used with students, participants began to view grades as a continuum of learning rather than silos, and the teachers developed more respect for their grade-level counterparts (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016).

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Trabona et al. (2019) and Handelzalts (2019) conducted studies offering additional support for the optimistic results reported by Suh and Seshaiyer (2015) and Ciampa and Gallagher (2016). Trabona and colleagues (2019) found as a result of collaborating, vertically grouped science teachers were able to see the curriculum and instructional practices across, rather than within, their specific grade-levels. Furthermore, the more the teacher's conversations focused on student learning, the more meaningful the group's collaboration became (Trabona et al., 2019). Handelzalts (2019) provided an additional international example with an exploration of vertical *Teacher Design Teams* tasked with evaluating and redesigning curricula in the Netherlands. While the results indicated that some teams shared more openly than others, when teams had a clear vision, they successfully collaborated around the content and merit of the curriculum.

To fully understand cross-divisional collaboration, its potential shortcomings and limitations must be articulated. First, an early study investigating whether vertical alignment, along with collaboration, would positively impact student test scores in Texas reported that vertical sharing had no significant effect on performance (Bergman et al., 1998). Of note, significant issues arose around this study's methods, especially how researchers measured vertical alignment and collaboration. Rather than assessing collaboration at the school- or teacher-level, the researchers gathered survey responses from district superintendent offices (Bergman et al. 1998). This top-down approach to data collection generated major issues around reliability.

Second, vertical collaboration asks teachers to digest a broad scope of information, which in some studies led to issues of direction and clarity (Handelzalts, 2019; Trabona et al., 2019). Third, traditional public school campuses tend to constrain opportunities for face-to-face cross-

divisional collaboration. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), of the nearly 100,000 public schools in the United States, less than seven percent house elementary and secondary grade-levels at a single site. While this structure does not eliminate the possibility of *vertical* collaboration, it does severely limit the potential of collaboration across divisional lines. Even when districts attempt to create a structure for cross-divisional collaboration, the literature highlights how challenging the practice can be. In a study of vertical alignment of the algebra curriculum, a district shared of their collaboration meetings, "they [the meetings] were not always well attended, if not because lack of interest, but the time and effort for some teachers to travel to the district office or use their personal time to attend" (Tanenbaum, et al., 2017, p. 31).

Lastly, related to the physical restrictions of vertical collaboration, teacher's inflexible schedules limit the overlapping opportunities to meet and collaborate across grade-levels (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016). In fact, in the studies conducted by Suh and Seshaiyer (2015) and Ciampa and Gallagher (2016), which arguably produced the most convincing evidence for cross-divisional collaboration, the researchers were forced to either negotiate with schools for teachers' leave time or use grant funds to hire substitute teachers so their research participants could attend collaboration meetings.

Independent Schools and Collaboration

Independent schools are educational institutions primarily funded by tuition payments and charitable contributions rather than public funds (NAIS, n.d.). In addition to their financial autonomy, independent schools are governed by trustees, rather than public school boards (Schuermann & McGovern, 2016), construct their own vision for learning, and experience a great deal of freedom to define their curricula (Baker et al., 2016).

Though independent schools are largely free from the constraints of educational policy mandates, changes in the economic and academic landscapes have thrust many independent schools into a period of reinvention. First, the overall downturn of the economy in the latter portion of the last decade created a sense of fiscal anxiety for many independent schools (NAIS, 2009). Additionally, the expansion of school choice initiatives has increased the market competition between independent schools and a growing number of state-backed public school options (Baker et al., 2016; Egalite & Wolf, 2016; Potterton, 2018). As independent schools try to navigate their shifting landscape, experts in the private school community recommend schools increase the diversity of their student body (NAIS, 2005, 2018), focus on developing their faculty and instructional practices (Balossi & Hernandez, 2016), identify and sincerely embrace what makes their school unique, and set goals of financial security (NAIS, 2005).

While cross-divisional collaboration in independent schools cannot help organizations plan for financial security, by increasing teaching content knowledge, a sense of responsibility for the curriculum, being more aware of potential content misconceptions, and increasing respect between teachers (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015) cross-divisional collaboration can have a profound impact on developing teachers for serving a more diverse set of learners and better understanding who they are as a school organization.

Though their reasonably flat and flexible governance structures and relative freedom to adjust curricular practices as they see fit make independent schools ideal settings for studying educational strategies, such as cross-divisional collaboration (Schuermann & McGovern, 2016), barriers to sharing still exist. In her single case study concentrated on independent school culture, Royal (2015) indicated that cultural differences between upper- and lower-grade teachers in independent schools could stifle sharing between the divisions. Additionally, Royal (2015) found

that the school building itself acted as a barrier to collaboration between independent school colleagues. These findings were in alignment with the results of both Spillane et al. (2017) and Reagans (2011), who reported that distance between peers, even on the same campus, significantly impacted professional relationships. Given Royal's (2015) findings, coupled with the artificial means utilized to gain teachers' time in other vertical collaboration studies (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019), the present research aimed to investigate how exemplar independent schools implement and maintain regular cross-divisional collaboration.

Summary

Collaboration has been extensively researched as a potential means for the professional development of teachers and increased student learning. The social complexities of school organizations complicate the implementation of meaningful collegial sharing. Leaders, both formal and informal, must maintain the relationships which undergird collaborative networks through means of trust and structures (Bridwell-Mitchell & Cooc, 2016; Hipp et al., 2008; Liou & Daly, 2014; Spillane & Shirrell, 2017; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). When the appropriate conditions are put in place, the literature supported collaboration as a means of improving teacher practice and student achievement.

Vertical or cross-divisional forms of collaboration represent a promising format of sharing, granting teachers a better understanding of the content and greater ownership of their particular portion of the curriculum. Independent schools have experienced unique financial and market pressures over the last few decades. To meet these changing demands, independent school professionals have published several recommendations for schools to follow, including increasing the capacity of faculty and increasing student diversity. Cross-divisional collaboration

is one way in which independent schools can improve teacher knowledge and practice and be better equipped to educate a more diverse body of learners.

Unfortunately, scarcely little research exists on independent schools and vertical collaboration. Therefore, to begin addressing this gap in the literature, as well as provide valuable knowledge for future research and practitioners, this study aimed to uncover how exemplar independent schools implement and practice regular cross-divisional collaboration.

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2 CROSS-DIVISIONAL COLLABORATION IN INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS: PROCESS

AND OUTCOMES

Introduction

Independent K-12 education in the United States carries a history dating back hundreds

of years (Schuermann & McGovern, 2016). The schools within this special category, also

referred to as private schools in this work, are each governed by a board of trustees which sets

the school's mission, vision, and policies (National Association of Independent Schools [NAIS],

n.d.). In addition to their distinctively nimble governance structures, independent schools are

characterized by their relative financial and curricular autonomy (Baker et al., 2016; NAIS, n.d.).

Like most other longstanding educational institutions in the United States (Henig, 2009, 2013),

independent schools experienced a shift within the educational landscape over the past decades.

Resultant from economic uncertainty and increased market pressures, many independent schools

have entered a period of evaluation and reinvention (Baker et al., 2016; Egalite & Wolf, 2016;

NAIS, 2016). To help solidify their value position within the educational landscape, researchers

and national independent school organizations recommend contemporary private schools

concentrate on building the capacities of their teachers (Balossi & Hernandez, 2016), increase

the diversity of their student populations (NAIS, 2005), and explore and implement innovative

curriculum design procedures to maximize student learning (NAIS, 2015).

Over recent years, a limited, yet promising body of work, specifically focused on cross-

divisional collaboration, emerged in educational research (Birkhead et al., 2017; Ciampa &

Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019). According to studies, vertical

collaboration which stretches across divisional lines has the ability to provide educators deeper

understandings of curricula, help predict potential content misconceptions, strengthen students'

overall academic bases, and even build respect and appreciation for the work of cross-divisional colleagues (Birkhead et al., 2017; Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019). Unfortunately, given the time and structural constraints that often stifle collegial interactions during a typical school day, many of the existing studies which bellowed the possibilities of cross-divisional collaboration also relied heavily on outside resources to secure common meeting time for teachers (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015). Consequently, within the literature, it is still largely unexplained how school leaders can implement and maintain cross-divisional collaboration under normalized circumstances.

As autonomous organizations, many independent schools situate multiple divisions on a single campus site, making cross-divisional forms of collaboration more openly accessible (Southern Association of Independent Schools [SAIS], 2020). In addition to independent schools' flexible policy structures and consolidated campus sites (SAIS, 2020; Schuermann & McGovern, 2016), independent schools offer arenas where the exploration of inventive strategies is encouraged and celebrated (NAIS, 2015). Schuermann and McGovern (2016) reinforced this belief proclaiming, "independent schools can serve as laboratories for new and effective practices, testing various pedagogical…and leadership approaches that could be applied across other learning environments" (p. 569).

Prompted by the identified gap in the cross-divisional collaboration literature and the potential for vertical collaboration to help schools meet the dynamic demands of their educational landscape (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015), the present study sought to explore the means and conditions under which exemplar independent schools practice cross-divisional collaboration. Additionally, absent the external interventions characterizing previous studies, this work concurrently aimed to reveal the perceived benefits of cross-

divisional collaboration in independent school organizations. The following guiding questions were of central importance to the research:

1. How do independent schools, identified as exemplars, practice cross-divisional collaboration?

   1a. What actions do formal, administrative leaders execute in promoting cross-divisional collaboration within independent schools?

   1b. What actions do non-administrative, or informal faculty leaders perform as a part of fostering cross-divisional collaboration in independent schools?

2. What are the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration in independent school communities?

Methodology

Overview

Though their physical and governance structures make private school organizations favorable sites for cross-divisional collaboration, empirical evidence demonstrated, even on these campuses, meaningful interactions between cross-divisional peers can be challenging due to cultural differences and physical site barriers (Royal, 2015). Therefore, as a crucial first step in meeting the communicated research goals of this project, it was imperative I reliably identify independent schools practicing a high level of cross-divisional sharing. To aid in isolating exemplar schools as potential sites of study, I leveraged the expertise of the Southern Association of Independent Schools and applied detailed criterion-based sampling methods.

After establishing this investigation's two exemplar schools, I implemented an embedded, multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018) with the central focus of uncovering the sites' methods of cross-divisional collaboration and identifying the leadership activities influencing its

practice. As a secondary objective, I also explored the subsequent benefits of cross-divisional sharing perceived by the individuals in the independent school community. According to Yin (2018), multiple-case studies allow researchers to investigate phenomena in their real-world setting and, through cross-case synthesis, strengthen the research's eventual outcomes.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which hit the United States during this research project, it was critical to the health and safety of everyone involved that I pivot a significant portion of the in-person data collection for this study to a virtual format. Though COVID-19 forced some revision to this study's execution, it in no way discouraged my tenacity to carry out a high level of research.

Once the identified site schools formally granted their permission to participate, I scheduled and conducted a virtual introductory meeting with each school's formal leaders. This initial meeting served as a platform for introductions, scheduling interviews, discussing the criteria for informal leader participation, and allowed school leaders the chance to ask questions about the research process. Following this introductory meeting, I conducted interviews with each participant, collected documents, and to the extent possible, due to the restrictions of COVID-19, recorded field notes in a journal.

Once all data were collected, I applied a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to develop themes for each case separately, before then synthesizing the emergent themes across the cases to reveal relevant patterns (Yin, 2018). The subsequent sections of this chapter detail the theoretical perspectives, research design, data collection, and data analysis, before then illustrating the findings from this work.

Theoretical Frame

Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize the importance of understanding your philosophical assumptions when conducting qualitative research. A researcher's choice of philosophical worldview (Creswell & Clark, 2017) justifies his or her decisions regarding both methodology and methods (Crotty, 1998), and for case studies, in particular, the research is enhanced when guided by previously developed theory (Yin, 2018). Therefore, this section's intention is first to explore the epistemological position I applied to this research and then illustrate how distributed leadership, as a theoretical lens, influenced the collection and interpretation of the data.

Epistemology

In his seminal work, Crotty (1998) defined epistemology simply as "how we know what we know" (p. 8). The discussion of "knowing" is as old as language itself (see for example, the works of Plato) and includes a myriad of contending philosophies.

Yin (2018) claims, case studies can accommodate a variety of epistemological views ranging from realist to relativist, though the assumptions embedded in a researcher's epistemological position have a profound impact on his or her research decisions. The present study focused on understanding cross-divisional collaboration from the perspective of those experiencing the phenomenon within the organization. Accordingly, this inquiry's main ambition was revealing the participants' shared reality, which they construct within the bounds of their school organization's distinct culture. This form of knowing can be understood best through the application of a social constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998). From this perspective, truth is neither universal nor subjective, but rather is socially constructed by the collective within the constraints of a shared culture (Crotty, 1998).

For clarity, it is essential to distinguish between constructivist and constructionist epistemologies. The former emphasizes truth from the perspective of the individual, whereas the latter stresses the role culture plays in formulating group knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Through the adopted social constructionist lens, I defined knowledge for this empirical study as school members' collective truth bounded by the established norms and expectations of their organization.

This epistemological position offers an explanation for how I interpreted the concept of knowing for this project, but a theoretical perspective was also necessary to provide context to the research process (Crotty, 1998).

Leadership Frame

The present study concentrated on cross-divisional collaboration in independent schools, wishing to illuminate how formal and informal leaders promote such a practice. Crotty (1998) explains that a theoretical perspective "is a statement of the assumptions brought to the research task" (p. 7). For this dissertation project, the theoretical assumptions about leadership and school organizations influenced both how the research was constructed and analyzed.

Distributed Leadership. Distributed leadership is a theory that gained quick favor in educational research after its introduction in the early 2000s (Mayrowetz, 2008). As was already covered in the previous chapter of this work, several interpretations of distributed leadership exist, but for this specific study, I applied Spillane's (2006) definition of distributed leadership to undergird the research decisions. According to Spillane and others (2001) "leadership involves the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning" (p. 24). Within this definition lie several non-explicit leadership judgments in need of

resolve, including the nature of leadership, distinguishing acts of leadership, and how it is assumed leadership interacts with the organization. Spillane offers clarity on each of these assumptions throughout his numerous published works. The following paragraphs expound on each of these topics.

With roots in both distributed cognition and activity theory, Spillane and colleagues (2001) view leadership "as a…practice, stretched over the school's social and situational context" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 23). Before his theoretical shift towards a continuum model of leadership, Gronn (2002) offered support for this view explaining leadership was less the property of an individual actor and more the result of the collective. This account of leadership as practice rather than person guided this study's decision to "de-center" formal school administrators (Mayrowetz, 2008), and include teacher leaders, who, through this lens, also play a crucial role in carrying out leadership in schools. Shifting the context of leadership from the singular to the many mandated the concept of leading receive further consideration.

In their research of school principals' day-to-day functions, Spillane and colleagues found it challenging to distinguish between formal leaders' managerial and leadership tasks (Spillane et al., 2007). In a later study, however, Pitts and Spillane (2009) drew a distinction between the two categories of actions. After interviewing several formal and informal leaders about their network interactions, the researchers concluded management tasks "maintain the status quo" (p. 196), while leadership actions influence or enhance teaching or learning (Pitts & Spillane, 2009). Distinguishing leading and managing were paramount to this work. In particular, Pitts and Spillane's (2009) findings helped filter participants' communicated actions and kept this study's data analysis focused on leading, not maintenance.

Perhaps most essential to this project was understanding how a distributed perspective assumes the features of leadership and the social structures of an organization interact with one another. As reported by Spillane and colleagues (2001), "A distributed perspective presses us to consider organizational structure as more than a vessel for leadership activity" (p. 26). Instead, the researchers explain the organization and leadership (both formal and informal) exist in a dynamic relationship, each holding a level of influence over the other. In lay terms, this view asserts the activity of leadership both influences and is impacted by the conditions of the organization. This interactive view of leadership and structure shaped the foci of this study, necessitating a light be applied to both how leaders affect collaboration and how the organization itself influences the aforementioned leadership actions. Spillane (2006) advanced a model for his interpretation of organizational-leadership interaction, which I adapted to fit the independent school setting in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Distributed Leadership Model: An Independent School Adaptation
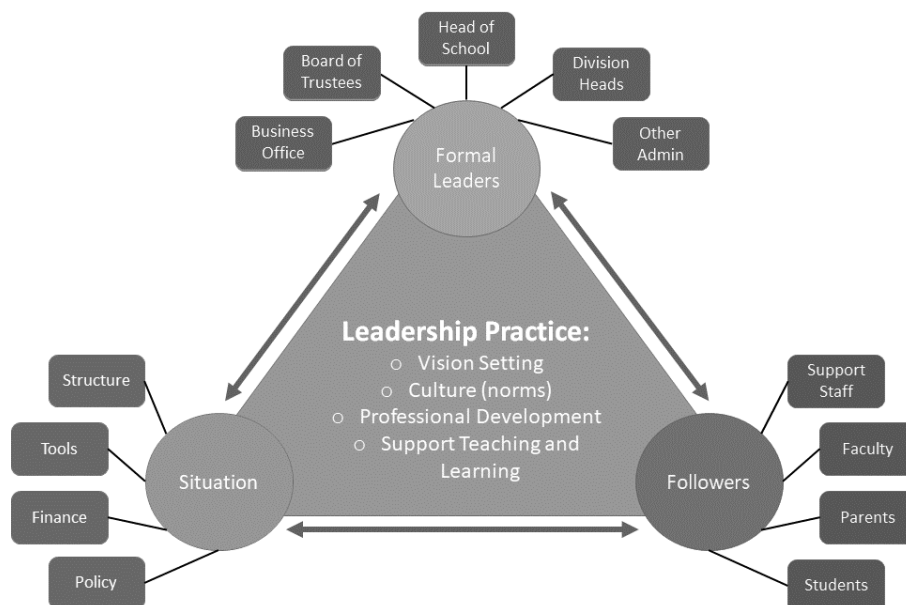
In summary, distributed leadership "provides a framework that helps researchers build evocative cases that can be used to help practitioners interpret and think about their ongoing practice of leadership" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 27). Given this study's desire to advance cross-divisional collaboration in schools by exploring how such sharing occurs in exemplar independent schools, the distributed frame offered sound theoretical grounding to design and carry out this work. The next section of this chapter goes into great detail on how this study was constructed and carried out within these reported theoretical and epistemological frames.

Research Design

Case study research involves the investigation of a "real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). Several methodologists advance different case study research interpretations, all with varying distinctions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because of his flexibility around data usage and his explanations of reliability and validity in qualitative research, I relied on Yin (2018) to frame the case study portion of this work.

In his text, Yin (2018) explains four approaches to case study research: single-case, single-case embedded, multiple-case, and multiple-case embedded. Each method has strengths and weaknesses, and each can be effective when applied under the proper circumstances. A single-case study is appropriate when the researcher wishes to explore a situation deemed an outlier, commonplace, new to research, or something best studied over a long period of time (Yin, 2018). Multiple-case studies, which Yin (2018) contends are simply a variant of case study research, not a separate methodology, provide the opportunity for case replication. Case replication allows the researcher to compare similar or opposing cases. Creswell and Poth (2018)

argue that multiple-case studies take away from the depth of case analysis because of the increased demands placed on the investigator. Yin (2018) also warns researchers interested in multiple-case studies of the extensive time and resource requirements but also offers the reassurance that the resulting evidence from multiple-case studies can be more convincing.

Ultimately, based on this project's research objectives, I adopted a multiple-case study involving two similar independent schools. Independent schools are each guided by a unique mission set by the schools' board of trustees (Boerema, 2006), and these mission statements are intended to inform all aspects of private school life. Therefore, a cross-case synthesis of two highly-collaborative independent schools, operating under the direction of separate missions, created the space for valuable themes to emerge for guiding both future studies and practitioners.

The final decision Yin (2018) encourages researchers to take under consideration when adopting a case study design is whether their study will be holistic or will examine embedded elements within each case. Yin (2018) stresses that a single-case may involve multiple subunits of analysis. For example, a study focused on family decision making patterns may choose to define its cases as nuclear family units. However, the research questions in this family study may be best addressed by the researchers if they focus their attention on the parents and children separately. In this example, parents and children would each represent an embedded element within the defined cases of the study.

This study's adoption of a distributed leadership, theoretical lens guided the investigative focus to both formal and informal leaders within independent school organizations. Bounding the study in this way "tightens the connection" between the cases and research questions (Yin, 2018, p. 31), but also necessitated accounting for these two distinct sets of individuals in the research

design. For this reason, I applied a multiple-case study embedded design to the construction and execution of this research.

From the educational leadership literature, Copland (2003) carried out a similar research design. In his work, Copland used a distributed leadership frame to investigate under what circumstances the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative was most successful. Though Copland chose to implement a full mixed-methods design, his case study portion of the project examining the specific perspectives of the positive performing exemplars was in alignment with the present work.

In his text, Yin (2018) provided a sample diagram of multiple-case study analysis (p. 58). In Figure 2, Yin's (2018) flow chart has been modified to fit the overall design of this work. In the following sections of this chapter, each area of the diagram will be expounded upon.

Figure 2

Overview: Research Design
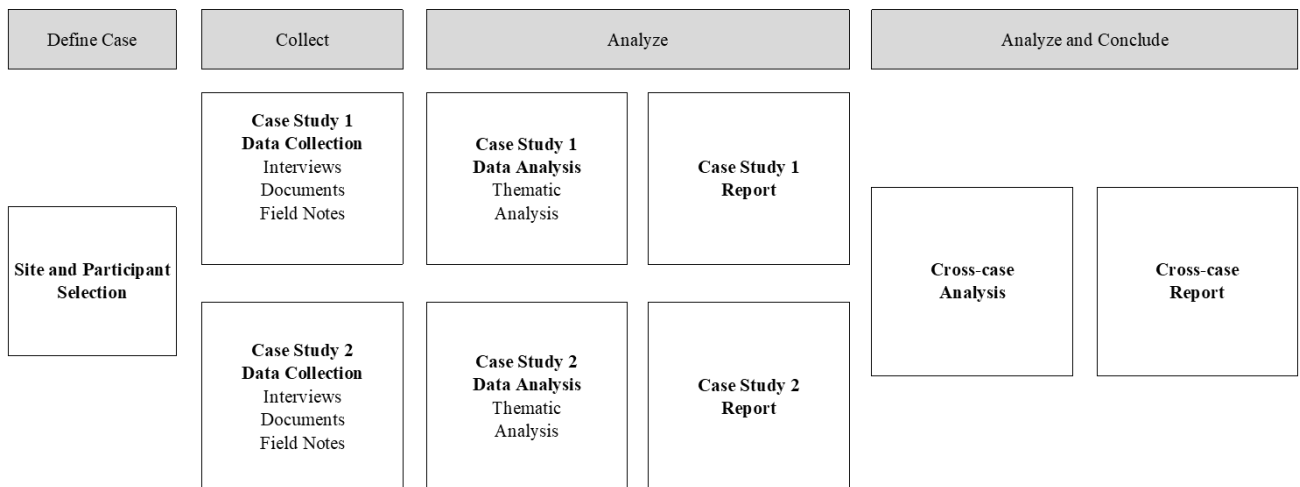
Sampling

Sampling is a crucial early-step in all qualitative work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Unlike quantitative research, which is concerned with generalization and requires probability sampling, researchers most frequently employ purposeful sampling in qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In case study research, purposeful sampling helps researchers ensure that their study's participants will provide useful data around the study's central phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While purposeful sampling can involve several different strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I employed a criterion sampling method for this project, fixed on identifying independent schools practicing cross-divisional collaboration at a high level.

Criterion sampling involves selecting cases based on how well they meet a list of critical attributes established by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the next section, the criteria for site selection are detailed, along with the methods I applied to ensure the selected schools met the set standards to the highest degree possible.

Site Selection

This study's design required participation from two independent schools, engaging in cross-divisional collaboration at an exemplary level. Due to the compulsory link between site selection and this study's overall success, I exercised an extraordinarily high level of intentionality and care during this portion of the research. The following criteria were used to help select appropriate site schools for participation in this multiple-case study: 1) the Southern Association of Independent Schools recommended the school as an exemplar of vertical collaboration, 2) the school included at least three divisions, or the grade-level equivalent of three divisions, 3) the school had not experienced a head of school or division head transition in the last three years, and 4) the school's leadership and faculty regularly practiced cross-divisional

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collaboration and found it impactful to teaching and learning. Figure 3 provides a sequential visual diagram of the overall procedures applied to site selection for this work.

   SAIS Recommendation. The Southern Association of Independent Schools (SAIS) is an organization focused on both the accreditation and professional development of independent school organizations (SAIS, n.d.). As a group of schools representative of the overall population of independent schools in the United States, this study utilized the pool of SAIS member schools as candidate sites for this work. As of 2020, SAIS reported accrediting 380 independent schools, mostly located in the southeastern United States (SAIS, 2020). Of its member schools, 47 percent of SAIS institutions are non-secular and 53 percent are secular. Of the religiously affiliated organizations 56 percent are non-denominational Christian, 23 percent are Episcopal, and 21 percent are either Catholic, Jewish, or Presbyterian. The average enrollment of SAIS schools is 582, with the smallest schools serving under 100 students and the largest institutions enrolling over 2,500 individuals. The fiscal resources of SAIS schools vary significantly, with 20 percent of member schools reporting an annual budget of under $3 million and the top-10-percent of schools declaring budgets in excess of $25 million. Finally, and critically for this work, data indicated that nearly 90 percent of SAIS institutions operate multiple scholastic divisions (SAIS, 2020). Through its accrediting processes and the relationships it has forged as a development organization, SAIS possessed expert knowledge around the quality and practices of its member-independent-schools, which was invaluable to this investigation.
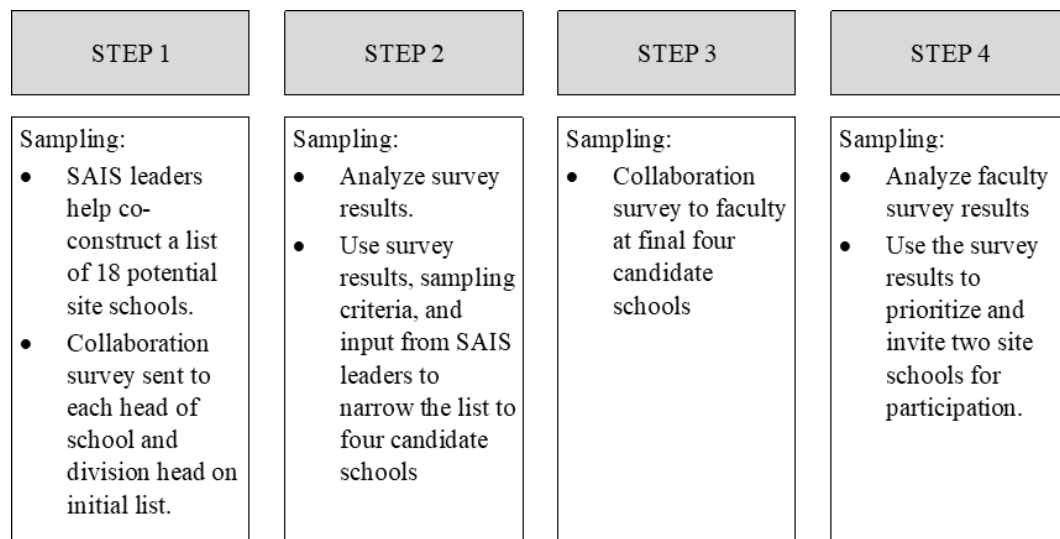
   The summer preceding the data collection for this project, I sent a study description and the site-school-sampling-criteria to the President of SAIS. After reviewing the requirements, by means of a virtual meeting, the SAIS President, Director of Accreditation, and the Accreditation and Survey Manager helped co-construct a list of 18 potential schools they felt met the

communicated goals of this study. The initial list provided by the SAIS leaders represented a

diverse base of schools including, single-gender, Montessori, international, and Christian

schools. Besides their categorical diversity, the recommended schools were geographically

spread between 12 distinct cities and six states in the southeastern United States.

Three Divisions. The recent studies centered on cross-divisional forms of vertical

sharing frequently focused their inquiry on collaborative groups comprised of elementary,

middle, and high school teachers (Birkhead et al., 2017; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al.,

2019). Cross-divisional collaboration allows teachers to better understand the overall curriculum

and how their specific content fits within the overall curricular progression (Ciampa &

Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015). As such, requiring site schools to have at least three

divisions increased the likelihood that faculty members at the participant schools actively

engaged in collaborative conversations with other teachers from distinctly different grade-levels

(i.e., elementary and high school, or pre-school and middle school).

Figure 3

Site Selection: Procedures Overview

STEP 1	STEP 2	STEP 3	STEP 4
Sampling: • SAIS leaders help co-construct a list of 18 potential site schools. • Collaboration survey sent to each head of school and division head on initial list.	Sampling: • Analyze survey results. • Use survey results, sampling criteria, and input from SAIS leaders to narrow the list to four candidate schools	Sampling: • Collaboration survey to faculty at final four candidate schools	Sampling: • Analyze faculty survey results • Use the survey results to prioritize and invite two site schools for participation.

Independent schools, however, do not always divide and title their divisions in the same manner. Thus, it was essential to articulate *divisions* by grade-level for this particular criterion rather than by site-defined labels. For the purpose of sampling, I categorized grade-level divisions as *early childhood, elementary, middle school,* and *high school,* tiered by the following grade-level distinctions: early childhood—considered as kindergarten and below, elementary—understood as Grades 1 through 5, middle school—defined as Grades 6 through 8, and high school—thought of as Grades 9 through 12. Defining divisions as specific grade-levels ensured I did not miss the opportunity to work with a highly-collaborative school that described its divisions as *upper-* and *lower-schools* only, but, in reality, educated students from kindergarten through 12th-grade.

To guarantee the eventual site schools met the *three division* criterion, I applied two separate procedures. First, I communicated and defined the three division requirement for SAIS leadership in advance of their recommendations and constructing their initial list of potential schools. Second, as an added layer of legitimacy, I verified the grades served at the potential site schools on SAIS's list through the public domain of each school's website.

Leadership Turnover. Organizational changes can be challenging, and leadership transitions are no exception (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Often new leaders are forced to balance the need to make improvements, or implement new programs, with an awareness that too much change too quickly could be detrimental to their overall vision and the organization's culture (Bolman & Deal, 2017). To be effective, leaders must build and model trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003), a complex attribute that takes time to establish.

Therefore, while the prioritized function of this study's site selection was to identify schools with the most effective forms of cross-divisional collaboration, *as much as was*

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reasonable, I limited candidate schools to organizations with consistency in head of school and division head leadership over the last three years.

Because leadership turnover is somewhat unpredictable, I confirmed leadership tenure at three separate stages during the site selection process. First, before a SAIS leader recommended a school for participation in this study, they consulted one another about the particular site's leadership stability. This practice occurred in real-time during the initial meeting with SAIS leaders. Second, as will be discussed in more detail in the next section, a survey was distributed to each head of school and division head at the 18 recommended sites. The survey form prompted leaders in its demographics section to indicate their current leadership tenure. Finally, just before I selected the finalist schools for participation, I once more consulted SAIS leaders to solicit their expertise and re-verify each potential site school's leadership status.

Leader and Faculty Survey. While SAIS leadership provided valuable insight into the practice of cross-divisional collaboration at each of the possible site schools, their collective assessments still only represented an external perspective. Therefore, to ensure each site school aligned with this study's research goals to the highest degree possible, it was necessary to gain each prospective school's internal views on cross-divisional collaboration at both the leadership and faculty levels.

In their study of teacher collaboration and student achievement, Ronfeldt et al. (2015) used online survey data to measure the *quality* of collaboration in teacher instructional teams. The researchers first asked survey respondents "if they were a part of 'a team or a group of colleagues that works together on instruction'" (Ronfeldt et al., 2015, p. 485). The team then asked all participants responding in the affirmative to answer a series of Likert-scale items concerning the *extent* and *helpfulness* of several areas of collaboration. For these items, the

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researchers reported a high level of internal validity (Cronbach's alpha = *0.93*). The research team then combined the responses for *extent* and *helpfulness* to develop a measure of *collaboration quality*, stating, "we do so [calculate the quality variable] because we make the assumption that collaboration viewed both as extensive and helpful is of better quality" (Ronfeldt et al., 2015, p. 488).

To gain a more in-depth understanding of the collaborative practices at each perspective site school, I utilized a simplified version of Ronfeldt et al.'s (2015) collaboration survey. In the next two sections, the methods applied to this final sampling criterion are discussed in detail.

Leadership Perspective. As the individuals responsible for setting the vision for collaborative practice (Moolenaar et al., 2010), school leaders were an excellent starting point for understanding the value placed on collaboration at each potential site school. To secure this critical perspective, I emailed an introductory letter and a link to the adapted collaboration survey to the heads of all 18 schools on SAIS's recommendation list. In the letter to each head of school, I invited others on the schools' leadership teams to complete the sampling survey as well.

After the leader's electronic consent, the adapted questionnaire (see Appendix A) prompted leaders to record the full name of their institution and self-report their years of service in their current position. Following the demographics section, the survey provided respondents this study's definition of collaboration before asking leaders: 1) To what extent do faculty in your school practice collaboration around teaching and learning? And, 2) How helpful to instruction and curricula, do you feel collaboration is in your school? After the general collaboration section, the survey continued with the definition of cross-divisional collaboration

and items focused directly on the school's cross-divisional sharing. Each survey item was measured on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from *not at all* to *substantially/very*.

Formal leaders were given two weeks to reply to the sampling survey, and I sent reminders to each head of school at the end of the first week and on the morning of the deadline.

I focused the leadership survey's analysis on the level of agreement between each school's formal leaders. Specifically, I sought schools whose leadership felt, as a collective, their school practiced collaboration and cross-divisional collaboration extensively and who believed cross-divisional collaboration was valuable to instruction. After analyzing responses from all 18 original schools, I selected *Buck Academy*, *Davidson Prep*, *Centennial Day School,* and *Logan's Brook Academy* (pseudonyms) as the final four candidate schools.

Faculty Perspective. Understanding formal administrators often play an indirect role in school organizations' collaborative practices (Supovitz et al., 2010), after narrowing the list to four candidate schools, I also solicited feedback directly from faculty before inviting any school for participation.

To petition the perspectives of faculty members, I sent the teachers at Buck Academy, Davidson Prep, Centennial Day School, and Logan's Brook Academy a collaboration questionnaire similar to the form completed by their leadership (see Appendix B). At Buck, Centennial Day, and Logan's Brook, teacher emails were publicly available through an online directory, and, accordingly, I sent an introductory letter and the sampling survey straight to faculty members at those schools. At Davidson Prep, teacher emails were not publicly available, and to guarantee delivery, I emailed a survey link and letter to the head of school, who then forwarded the form to the school's faculty.

In line with the leadership questionnaire, the faculty survey shared this study's definitions of collaboration and cross-divisional collaboration before prompting respondents to reply to items concerning the *extent* and *helpfulness* of each specific collaborative practice. Unlike the leadership form, however, the faculty's sampling survey asked participants to think about collaboration from their perspective, rather than the school at large.

Faculty were given two weeks to reply to the form, and during that time frame, I prompted respondents twice with email reminders. Following the response deadline, *Logan's Brook* was removed from consideration due to a lack of faculty responses. The results of Buck Academy, Davidson Prep, and Centennial Day School are organized in Table 1.

Table 1

Faculty Responses: Percent Agreement of Cross-Divisional Collaboration Questionnaire

Item	School	Percent Agreement			
		Substantially	Some Depth	A Little	Not at All
Extent instruction and curriculum are vertically discussed	Buck Academy	7	43	36	14
	Davidson Prep	30	57	11	2
	Centennial Day	17	33	46	4
		Very Helpful	Helpful	A Little	Not at All
How helpful is cross-divisional collaboration to instruction or curriculum	Buck Academy	36	43	21	0
	Davidson Prep	56	39	4	1
	Centennial Day	38	29	29	4

Note: Table reflects the faculty averages of the two items for *extent* and the two items for *helpfulness*.

After analyzing the faculty questionnaire results, I prioritized Davidson Prep and Centennial Day School for participation in the case study portion of this research project. Two key elements drove the rationale for selecting Davidson and Centennial as the exemplars over Buck Academy. First, 14 percent of all faculty respondents from Buck Academy indicated the school did not collaborate on instruction or curriculum cross-divisionally. In comparison to the other two organizations, I judged this proportion to be too high. Additionally, although Buck Academy had experienced relative stability in its leadership, its head of school was moving into only his second full year and did not meet the leadership turnover criterion to the same degree as Davidson or Centennial. After isolating Centennial Day and Davidson Prep as the most ideal schools for participation in the multiple case study, I sent invitations and full study descriptions to the heads of both institutions.

After reviewing the information, both Centennial Day and Davidson Prep granted their approval to participate through signed permission letters. In the next section, a brief description of Davidson Prep and Centennial Day School is provided.

Site Description

Davidson Prep. Founded in the late 1960s, Davidson Prep is a three-year-old through 12th-grade Christian school in the southeastern United States. Emerging from rows of ranch-style houses, Davidson's 25-acre suburban campus is nestled amongst southern pines and live oak trees. Davidson's mission of "Educating the Mind, Body, and Spirit" drives all aspects of its campus-life, and its mission is articulated further by its core values of Respect, Responsibility, Honor, Compassion, and Excellence. In addition to its mission and core values, Davidson Prep is genuinely committed to fostering a sense of community and care for its students, parents, faculty and staff, and alumni.

Davidson Prep defines its four academic divisions as kindergarten, elementary

school, middle school, and high school. Davidson's kindergarten program includes K3, K4, and

K5 classes, each serving three-, four-, and five-year-old students, respectively. The elementary

school at Davidson Prep starts in first-grade and ends after fifth. The middle school at Davidson

is comprised of Grades 6 through 8, and the high school is defined as Grades 9 through 12.

At the time of this research, Davidson Prep enrolled an all-time high, 1,304 students

(K=248, ES, 407, MS=294, HS=355), and it employed roughly 150 faculty members. As

reported by its head of school, the student body of Davidson Prep is 5 percent students of color,

and approximately 5 percent of all students receive tuition assistance.

Centennial Day School. With over a 100-year academic history, Centennial Day is a

nonsectarian school serving students from kindergarten through 12th-grade. Initially founded in

the early 1900s, under a different name, Centennial Day in its most current form was established

in the mid-1970s. Centennial's 7-acre main campus is located at the urban-periphery of a large

southern city and in the shadows of a major research university. In addition to its urban campus,

Centennial Day has an 80-acre auxiliary site with several athletic fields and areas for outdoor

education.

Centennial Day School aligns its three academic divisions as lower school, middle school,

and upper school. The lower school at Centennial begins at kindergarten and runs through

fourth-grade. Centennial's middle school serves Grades 5 through 8, and high school includes

students from ninth-grade through graduation.

Centennial Day "fosters each student's intellectual, artistic, and athletic potential" and is

deeply committed to creating an "environment that represents the cultural and ethnic

composition of [its city]." At the time of this study, Centennial Day reported an overall

enrollment of 1,083 students (ES=350, MS=316, HS=417) and roughly 200 faculty and staff members. In line with its mission, Centennial Day's student body is 38 percent students of color, and the school provides over $3.5 million in financial aid to just over a fifth of its students.

With a detailed understanding of how this study arrived at Davidson Prep and Centennial Day School as exemplars of cross-divisional collaboration, the next section of this work outlines the methods used for identifying the case participants at each site.

Participant Selection

In his case study text, Yin (2018) underscores the importance of defining the case or cases to be studied. Guided by this investigation's intended goals and its theoretical frame, I designated the case within each site school as the group of leaders responsible for the implementation and practice of cross-divisional collaboration. Embedded within this case-definition is distributed leadership's assumption that the *act* of leadership is stretched across the entire organization (Spillane, 2006). Therefore, in line with Yin's (2018) *embedded case study* design, participants within the specified cases for this research project included the formal leaders at each site school, as well as one informal leader representative from each of the schools' divisions.

Formal Leader Selection. At both, Davidson Prep and Centennial Day, formal leaders were identified by their title and role, in relationship to the school's collaborative practices. Importantly, individuals who held a formal title, but primarily served as teachers, such as department chairs, were not categorized as formal leaders for this study.

At Davidson Prep, after providing a description of this work and its objectives, the head of school, kindergarten principal, elementary principal, high school principal, and the director of instruction emerged as the leaders closest to the school's practice of collaboration. At the time of

this study, Davidson's middle school principal was in the midst of transitioning to a new role at the school, and as a result chose not to participate in this project.

At Centennial Day School the formal leader participants included the director, the head of lower school, the head of middle school, and the head of high school. A description of the formal leader participants by school is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Description of Formal Leader Participants by School

Davidson Prep			
Name	Position	Years at School	Role Description
Cynthia Cole	Kindergarten Principal	24	Supervises K3, K4, and K5
Amy Martenson	Elementary Principal	5	Supervises Grades 1-5
William Payton	High School Principal	15	Supervises Grades 9-12; serves as associate head of school
David Clark	Director of Instruction	7	Supports curriculum, development, and alignment in Grades 6-12
Charles Gaines	Head of School	9	Oversees the day-to-day operations of entire organization.
Centennial Day School			
Name	Position	Years at School	Role Description
Mary Matthews	Head of Lower School	7	Supervises K through Grade 4
Joseph Allen	Head of Middle School	23	Supervises Grades 5-8
Thom Washington	Head of High School	5	Supervises Grades 9-12
Robert Alligood	Director	21	Oversees the day-to-day operations of entire organization

Note: All names listed are pseudonyms.

Titles and job descriptions easily distinguished formal leaders from other staff members within each of the site schools. However, reliably identifying the informal leaders with intimate knowledge of the schools' practices of cross-divisional collaboration presented more of a challenge.

      Informal Leader Selection. To identify one informal leader within each division of the site schools, I once again employed a criterion-based approach, requiring each informal leader to meet the following: 1) recommended by one of the formal leaders in the study, 2) teach in a core-academic area or self-contained class (i.e., a first-grade teacher responsible for all academic instruction), and 3) have at least three years of experience at their respective school. To allow formal leaders to reflect before recommending a teacher, I presented and discussed the above standards with each school during their virtual introductory meeting.

      Formal Leader Recommendation. Through a distributed leadership lens, informal leaders do not act as individuals but rather as a part of the collective, responsible for carrying out the activity of leading in the school (Spillane et al., 2001). While any teacher may be influential, to be considered a teacher leader, the momentum he or she creates must be in concert with the overall vision and mission of the organization. Therefore, as those most knowledgeable of their faculty and the direction of the school, each division head or principal was asked to recommend one teacher from their division for participation in this study. At Davidson Prep, in lieu of the middle school principal, the director of instruction, who also worked closely with the middle school faculty, provided the middle school teacher recommendation.

      Core-Subject Teacher. Both cross-divisional (Birkhead et al., 2017; Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015) and general collaboration studies (Parise & Spillane, 2010; Spillane et al., 2012, 2018) frequently rely on subject-specific teacher groupings (i.e., math

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and language arts) to investigate collaboration in schools. These research decisions are easily justified based on the nature of vertical collaboration's intended goals, most notably to better articulate the curriculum and more clearly understand where students may develop misconceptions (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015). Following these studies' examples, I only considered core-subject teachers (i.e., math, language arts, social studies, and science) for participation in this work. Those meeting this criterion consisted of early childhood and elementary teachers with self-contained classrooms or core-content teachers in middle or high school.

In addition to following the model set by previous studies, this sampling requirement removed the possibility of a formal leader recommending a co-curricular teacher (i.e., band, gym, art). Co-curricular instructors in independent schools often teach an extensive range of grade-levels and, consequently, may not rely on cross-divisional peers to articulate their curriculum vertically.

School Experience. Finally, the last qualification required informal leader participants to have at least three years of experience at their specific school, not necessarily their current position. Requiring informal leaders to have three years of experience insulated this study from strong teachers, who may not yet have a full grasp of the school's culture. Limiting participation to teachers with a perceived knowledge of the social norms and structures of their school was in line with the epistemological frame of this research. In table 3, a summary and description of each informal leader participant is provided.

Table 3

Description of Informal Leader Participants by School

Davidson Prep				
<u>Name</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Grades Taught</u>	<u>Years at School</u>
Annie Reese	Kindergarten	K4 Teacher	K4	10
Courtney Nichols	Elementary	First-Grade Teacher	1	13
Emily Polli	Middle School	English Teacher	7, 8	6
Chris Taylor	High School	Head of Science Department	8, 9, 11, 12	6
Centennial Day School				
<u>Name</u>	<u>Division</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Grades Taught</u>	<u>Years at School</u>
Lori Oliver	Elementary	First-Grade Teacher	1	15
Zach Keller	Middle School	Sixth-Grade History Teacher	6	11
Allison Riley	High School	History Instructor for High School	10, 11	4

Note: All names listed are pseudonyms.

Data Collection

According to Yin (2018), one of the primary benefits of case study research is the opportunity to use multiple sources of data. Yin (2018) expanded on this thought, explaining, "multiple sources of evidence in case study research relates to the basic motive for doing a case study in the first place: to do an in-depth study of a phenomenon in its real-world context" (p. 127). Ideally, the "study of a phenomenon in its real-world context" (Yin, 2018, p. 127) would take place within the context of the aforementioned phenomenon. However, after this project was underway, the COVID-19 Pandemic hit the United States and crippled my ability to collect data in-person at Centennial Day and Davidson Prep. Consequently, out of sincere concern for

the health and safety of the participants, and guided by the recommendations of Georgia State University and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a significant portion of data collection for this multiple case study research took place through virtual platforms. Though COVID-19 forced a significant adjustment to the setting of this study's data collection, it did not deter the spirit or rigor I applied to this research.

Influenced by both Yin (2018) and the circumstances of COVID-19, I relied on interviews and document analysis to explore the means and outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration within independent schools. In addition to interviews and document collection, I made a single site visit to tour Davidson Prep, collect field notes, and conduct follow-up interviews. Though in-person data collection was severely limited, the structure of the actualized data collection methods for this project mirrored its original design and intent. Figure 4 below provides a succinct overview of the data collection implemented during this multiple-case study. In the following sections, the rationale and application of each form of data collection are covered in some detail.

Semi-Structured Interviews

According to Yin (2018), "One of the most important sources of case study evidence is the interview" (p. 118). Accordingly, I used semi-structured interviews (Roulston, 2010) as the primary source of data for this study. Semi-structured interviews provided an ideal balance between standardization and flexibility for this project. The equilibrium between rigor and adaptability exemplified by semi-structured interviews, especially when applied within this multiple-case study design (Roulston, 2010), helped ensure a level of uniformity between each participant while also allowing for the exploration of fortuitous topics on an individual basis.

Figure 4

Multiple-Case Study: Data Collection Overview

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
DAVIDSON: • Introductions • Discuss overall research process • Discuss criteria for informal leader participation • Discuss document collection • Schedule formal leader interviews	DAVIDSON: • Formal leadership interviews • Identify informal leader • Document collection	DAVIDSON: • Informal leader interviews • *Potential follow-up interview with formal leadership if necessary* • Document collection	DAVIDSON: • Member checking • Site visit • Tour school • *Potential follow-up interview with informal leaders if necessary* • Document collection
CENTENNIAL: • Introductions • Discuss overall research process • Discuss criteria for informal leader participation • Discuss document collection • Schedule formal leader interviews	CENTENNIAL: • Formal leadership interviews • Identify informal leader • Document collection	CENTENNIAL: • Informal leader interviews • *Potential follow-up interview with formal leadership if necessary* • Document collection	CENTENNIAL: • Member checking • *Potential follow-up interview with informal leaders if necessary* • Document collection

Though, through a distributed leadership lens, both formal and informal leaders carry out the act of leading, their perspectives within their school organization are distinct (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001). Therefore, I constructed separate interview protocols for formal and informal leader participants, and to bolster their validity, I closely followed the Interview Protocol Refinement Framework (IPRF) to build and revise each form (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

Interview Protocol Refinement Framework. The IPRF is a four-phase process for

evaluating the validity of an interview instrument (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Presented by

Castillo-Montoya (2016), the IPRF involves creating an interview matrix, assuring the protocol

is written using inquiry-based conversation language, having experts review the interview items,

and then piloting the protocol with a trusted friend or colleague. Each of these four phases is

covered in brief detail below.

Phase 1. According to Castillo-Montoya (2016), the purposes for constructing interview

matrices are to understand how and if the interview questions align with the study's research

questions and identify potential gaps in the protocol. For both interview protocols, I created a list

of empirically supported subjects within each of this study's research questions and then marked

a cell within a matrix if I felt the item had the potential to lead a participant to speak to that

particular idea. In addition to the topical areas of the matrices, at the bottom of every matrix

column, I wrote conscientious feedback on every interview question, and I revised each item as

was necessary. I repeated the entire matrix process twice for each protocol before progressing

to *Phase 2.*

Phase 2. Phase 2 of the IPRF involves "constructing an inquiry-based conversation"

(Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 813). In lay terms, the second phase of the IPRF asks the researcher

to humbly assess if the essential questions are being asked and if the "academic" and "research"

jargon is being left at home. To ensure my protocols were accessible and easily understood, I

asked a credible teaching professional to carefully review the language within the interview

forms for clarity and provide feedback.

Phase 3. Phase 3 is potentially the most straightforward in the IPRF and simply involves having multiple experts review the instrument. To fulfill this step in the process, I solicited feedback from my entire dissertation committee.

Phase 4. Finally, the last phase of the IPRF involves piloting the instrument with persons "who mirror the characteristics of the sample to be interviewed in the actual study" (Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 827). For this phase of the framework, I piloted my protocols with trusted professional peers, who, importantly, exemplified the formal and informal leader participants in this study. Following the piloting process, I made final revisions to each semi-structured protocol.

Interview Data. Using the constructed formal (see Appendix C) and informal leader protocols (see Appendix D), after receiving formal consent, I conducted an initial conversation with each participant in the study. At Davidson and Centennial, I interviewed the principals and division heads first before scheduling time with each division's respective teacher leader. At both sites, I delayed my conversation with the head of school until I completed interviews with all other participants. This research decision allowed my time with the heads of school to be as focused as possible. Each of the initial semi-structured interviews took place through a password-protected Zoom meeting room. These initial conversations lasted no longer than one hour, and I captured audio using two recording programs.

After completing the initial discussions with each participant, I carried out a small number of follow-up interviews to add clarity to the data. At Davidson, I conducted follow-up interviews, in-person, with the high school and elementary school principals during my single site visit to their campus. These conversations took place in each principal's office and were

recorded using a single audio recorder. Neither of the follow-up interviews at Davidson Prep

exceeded a half-hour in length.

At Centennial Day, I only had a small number of follow-up questions, which the director

and high school principal replied to through email.

In sum, I conducted 20 interviews; 11 at Davidson Prep and nine at Centennial Day.

Following each conversation, I transcribed the interview and stored the transcription and audio

files in a password-protected folder all housed on my personal computer and an external storage

device. I secured all interview hard copies in a locked file cabinet in my home office. And,

finally, for the purpose of member checking, I emailed each participant a scanned copy of his or

her interview, which was annotated with my initial thoughts in the margins.

Document Collection

Research centered on professional collaboration and leadership regularly finds that school

structures such as committees and formal teams are predictive of collaborative relationships in

schools (Bridwell-Mitchell & Cooc, 2016; Hipp et al., 2008; Spillane et al., 2015). Additionally,

research often cites time as one of the most limiting factors of collaboration (Ciampa &

Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015). Thus, a crucial aspect of exploring cross-divisional

collaboration was investigating the policies and circumstances under which it occurs.

As "humanly crafted artifacts," documents can resolutely "serve as active agents and

counter-agents of social action" (Prior, 2003, p. 14), providing valuable insight into decisions

and events. While documents offer snapshots of policies and practices, Yin (2018) warns against

adopting documents as "literal recordings of events that have taken place" (p. 115). Heeding

Yin's (2018) advice, I collected documents primarily as a means of making inferences and

triangulating interview responses.

Based on the findings of previous research, during the introductory meeting with each school site, I requested artifacts such as calendars, schedules, and handbooks. Additionally, as interviews took place, I created a list of documents either mentioned directly by participants or documents, if existent, would add support to the interview data. After completing the interview data collection process, I sent my focused list to the formal leaders at each site and respectfully requested the final supplementary documents.

At Davidson Prep, the additional documents included items such as mentoring policies, onboarding programs, goal setting templates, committee lists, leave policies, curriculum maps, and lesson plans. Davidson's elementary, middle, and high school documents were provided electronically by the director of instruction, while the kindergarten principal provided hard copies of her documents in a binder during my visit to the Davidson campus.

At Centennial Day, the expanded list of requested documents included artifacts such as mentoring programs, committee lists, meeting minutes, faculty reports, and accreditation documents. Centennial provided electronic copies of their documents, which the head of school's office provided through email.

I stored all electronic documents in a password-protected folder and locked the hard copy documents in a file cabinet located in my home office.

Direct Observation

Distributed leadership contends that both the leader and the organization carry a degree of influence over the other (Spillane, 2006; Spillane et al., 2001). For instance, if the head of an independent school sees an influx of kindergarten applicants, he or she may wish to add another class to that particular grade-level for the upcoming school year. However, if the school building's classroom space has already been maximized, the new kindergarten section is not a

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reality. In response to this constraint, the same head of school may choose to have a flex-classroom constructed, but under the initial circumstances, the organization limited what the leader could do. In addition to the organization's impact on leadership practice, the empirical research highlights the criticality of physical proximity and overlapping communal spaces on developing and maintaining collaborative relationships (Reagans, 2011; Spillane et al., 2017; Spillane & Shirrell, 2017).

As was stated earlier in this section, this study took place during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and, consequently, direct observation was limited. However, I did make a single site visit to tour Davidson Prep. During my visit, I collected field notes with a special focus on the school's physical layout and design. Following my visit, I locked my field note journal in my home office desk.

At the onset of data collection for this study, Centennial Day was in the process of returning its high school to full in-person instruction, and its lower school was managing a small number of positive COVID-cases. For these reasons, and out of an abundance of caution for the research participants, I did not make a site visit to Centennial Day School.

In the next sections of this chapter, the data analysis methods are outlined before sharing the findings from this work.

Data Analysis

To add validity to case study research, Yin (2018) encourages researchers during the data analysis phase to attend to all the collected evidence, maintain a focus on the most important issues of the study, and adopt a strategic plan which involves cycling between the raw data, the interpretations, and the eventual conclusions. Strategies for case study analysis include *pattern matching*, *explanation building*, *time-series analysis, logic models,* and *cross-case*

synthesis (Yin, 2018). Based on the present study's multiple-case study approach, I chose to utilize a *cross-case synthesis* to approach the overall analysis of the data.

Cross-case synthesis, also referred to as "case base" synthesis, involves "retaining the integrity of the entire case" (Yin, 2018, p. 196) and then comparing previously identified patterns across the cases. Informed by this definition, a cross-case synthesis necessitated completing an examination of each case separately before drawing comparisons. Yin (2015) promotes a framework for qualitative data analysis involving *compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting,* and *concluding.* However, to attend to each case's data set, I chose to carry out a *thematic analysis* because of its highly-systematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Figure 5

Multiple-Case Study: Data Analysis Overview

Davidson: Phase 1	Davidson: Phase 2	Davidson: Phase 3	Davidson: Phase 4	Davidson: Phase 5
• Transcribe Interviews • Re-read Document and Field Notes • Annotate Initial Thoughts	• Code Data • Organize into database	• Cluster Codes • Initial themes • Map themes	• Evaluate potential themes at code level • Validate themes against data set	• Define themes and sub-themes

Centennial: Phase 1	Centennial: Phase 2	Centennial: Phase 3	Centennial: Phase 4	Centennial: Phase 5
• Transcribe Interviews • Re-read Document and Field Notes • Annotate Initial Thoughts	• Code Data • Organize into database	• Cluster Codes • Initial themes • Map themes	• Evaluate potential themes at code level • Validate themes against data set	• Define themes and sub-themes

Cross-Case Synthesis
- Review individual case themes
- Cycles of pattern identification
- Review candidate patterns against case data
- Define patterns

Thematic Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis includes six

phases: *familiarizing, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining*

themes, and producing the report. Though each phase represents a distinct step in the process,

thematic analysis "involves a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the

coded extracts of data…and the analysis of the data that you are producing" (Braun & Clarke,

2006, p. 86). In this way, thematic analysis aligns well with Yin's (2018) recommendation that

the analysis should cycle between the various levels of data. Furthermore, to better retain the

integrity of the individual cases (Yin, 2018) and limit the potential for bias, I completed the

entire thematic analysis for Davidson Prep, stepped away from the investigation for several days,

and then later repeated the process for Centennial Day School.

In the context of this study, Phase 6 of thematic analysis, producing the report, simply

refers to writing the actual dissertation, a process needing no additional explanation. However,

the methods applied during Phases 1 through 5 of this study's thematic analyses are covered in

detail in the following sections. For a high-level overview, Figure 5 illustrates this study's

overall data analysis process.

Phase 1: Familiarizing. The initial phase of thematic analysis involves immersing

yourself in the data and interacting with it in an "active way—searching for meanings, patterns,

and so on" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). Interview transcription offers an early opportunity to

engage in analysis and data familiarization (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Roulston (2010) contends,

"During transcription, interviewers re-listen to their interviews, review the topics discussed, and

begin the process of interpreting interview data and generating preliminary analyses" (p. 105).

Thus, in Phase 1 of the thematic analysis, I carefully listened to and transcribed all interview

data. After completing a full transcription of each interview, I then re-listened to the recordings and annotated my initial thoughts on hard copy transcriptions of the conversations. In addition to transcribing and annotating my interviews, I re-read my collection of field notes and documents in this early stage of analysis.

  Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes. The second phase of thematic analysis is when the researcher develops the initial codes based on the emergent patterns in the familiarization stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this stage, Braun and Clarke (2006) advise researchers to develop codes for all possible outcomes, respect the context around each idea, and like Yin (2018), encourage equal consideration to be given to all data.

  To begin Phase 2, I built a database using Microsoft Excel to systematically organize the data extracts and codes by source and research question. To attend to *how* schools practice cross-divisional collaboration, I created two sheets within the database, one for *practice* and the other for *leadership activities.* Guided by this study's theoretical frame, I coded formal and informal leaders on the same *leadership activity* sheet, color coding the extracts to distinguish the two categories of leader easily. To organize the codes focused on the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration in independent schools, I made a third sheet to organize the *outcomes* presented in the data. Finally, I copied this work's established definitions of leadership, collaboration, and cross-divisional collaboration at the top of every sheet in my initial database to serve as a constant reminder of this investigation's central focus (Yin, 2018).

  As I developed the initial codes, I re-listened to and followed along with the interviews as a mechanism for ensuring equal attention was given to all data, and I did not erroneously omit crucial context (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Yin, 2018). For each data extract, I coded for "as many potential themes/patterns as possible" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 89). For example, in this stage,

the data extract "We have honest conversations about what we didn't do, right…but it also comes from a standpoint of… But let me help you get there," was coded for *open/honest communication*, *support teachers,* and *accountability.* Once all interview data were coded, I completed the same process for all documents and field notes, taking care to read each slowly since listening was not possible. To conclude Phase 2 and prepare for Phase 3, I alphabetized the initial codes within the database.

   Phase 3: Searching for Themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) assert the third phase, "re-focuses the analysis at the broader level…involves sorting the codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded extracts within the identified themes" (p. 89). To initiate my search for themes, I further organized the alphabetized codes into related clusters. Manipulating the data in this way created a clearer picture of the overall data set and allowed the initial candidate themes to emerge.

   Once all data were separated into clusters, I created a column for each potential theme and sub-theme and began to sort the codes accordingly. As codes added structure to each theme, I remained vigilant about their appropriateness. When questions materialized around a theme or sub-theme, I cycled back to Phase 2 and revisited the individual data extracts to certify the code aligned with the developing patterns or if the data dictated a revision to the candidate themes.

   To increase the reliability of case study research, Yin (2018) recommends researchers maintain a clear chain of evidence in which the researcher can trace the findings from the thematic level, through the code and extract levels, all the way back to their data sources. To establish a definitive and concise chain of evidence, once all codes were organized beneath their candidate themes, I assigned a unique label to each code and an individualized reference number

to every extract. I linked these distinct identifiers beneath each candidate theme, creating the ability to cycle between theme, code, extract, and data source within the database.

In conjunction with sorting codes thematically, Braun and Clark (2006) suggest making a thematic map during the third phase to understand the linkages between the codes and candidate themes more clearly. Thus, before moving into Phase 4 of the analysis, I constructed thematic flow charts for *practice*, *leadership,* and *perceived outcomes.*

Phase 4: Reviewing Themes. Phase 4 of thematic analysis requires verifying the candidate themes at two different levels (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, Level 1 "involves reviewing the coded data extracts" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 91) and discerning whether or not they form a coherent pattern beneath each theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To complete this first check, I utilized the evidence chains I established in Phase 3 to follow each theme, to its codes, and eventually to the individual data extracts. During this check, when the review uncovered any thematic inconsistencies, I cycled back to Phase 3. Cycling between Phase 4 and Phase 3 prompted some themes to split and others to collapse into a single, more comprehensive idea.

Once my revisions were complete in Level 1, I moved to the Level 2 review, which considered "the validity of individual themes in relation to the entire data set" (Braun & Clarke, p. 91). To meet this end, I re-listened to my interviews and read back through my collected documents to confirm each theme from a much broader context.

Though Braun and Clarke (2006) offer no definitive rule on when to conclude Phase 4, they do warn, "coding data and generating themes could go on *ad infinitum…*when your refinements are not adding anything substantial, stop" (p. 92). Once I was confident the themes represented the data well, I pushed forward to the fifth phase of the analysis.

Phase 5: Defining Themes. Phase 5 was especially beneficial to this study's data analysis and involved creating definitions to represent the "essence" of each theme. During this final investigative stage, I expressed definitions in lay terms for each theme and sub-theme and, consequently, uncovered narrow overlaps in the emerging ideas. To correct these small redundancies, I cycled between Phases 3, 4, and 5, continuing to write and re-write definitions until I was satisfied each theme articulated a unique and compelling pattern from the data.

As was previously discussed, I carried out the entire thematic analysis process twice to protect each case's uniqueness and minimize the potential for bias. Following the full thematic analysis of each site school, I conducted a cross-case synthesis to reveal the critical patterns between each case's themes.

Cross-Case Synthesis

The purpose of performing a cross-case synthesis is to "compare or synthesize any within-case patterns across the cases" (Yin, 2018 p. 196). Because independent schools are each governed by their own board of directors (NAIS, n.d.) and guided by a unique mission and vision (Boerema, 2006), identifying patterns in how each site school practiced cross-divisional collaboration were critical to reliably answering this study's research questions. To uncover the within-case patterns between Centennial Day School and Davidson Prep, I adapted and applied methods from Phases 3, 4, and 5 of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework.

First, I scanned the overall findings from each case and spent considerable time brainstorming the potential patterns between the two sites. After each brainstorming cycle, I re-read each case's findings and repeated the pattern until no new themes of substance emerged.

After constructing my initial list of potential patterns, I organized the ideas into *practice, leadership activities,* and *outcomes.* Next, I manipulated the patterns into potential themes and

sub-themes and created a flowchart to express the developing ideas succinctly. Once all information was organized, I reviewed the patterns against Davidson Prep and Centennial Day's individual data sets. During the review process, I revised the cross-case patterns until they coherently reflected the commonalities between each site. The final step of the cross-case synthesis was to formally articulate each pattern. Yin (2018) warns researchers against disregarding the uniqueness of each case during synthesis. Thus, while defining each cross-case theme, I was careful to acknowledge the thematic commonalities without evading the divergences between each site.

The above section covered in detail the methods utilized for this study's data analysis. Each site school's distinctiveness was preserved by first conducting individual thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006) for Davidson Prep and Centennial Day School. Then, to strengthen the overall findings, a cross-case synthesis was carried out to uncover the meaningful patterns between each school. In the next section of this chapter, the findings stemming from this inquiry are presented.

Findings

The limited number of previous studies focused on cross-divisional collaboration reported encouraging outcomes when educators discussed issues of teaching and learning in cross-divisional teams (Birkhead et al., 2017; Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Handelzalts, 2019; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019). However, as this work previously presented, time and proximity issues limited these investigations, forcing the vertical teams to form outside the schools' typical organizational structures (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Handelzalts, 2019; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019). For example, in the studies conducted by Suh and Seshaiyer (2015) and Ciampa and Gallagher (2016), the researchers either negotiated with

schools or purchased leave time so teachers could attend their cross-divisional meetings. In the works performed by Trabona et al. (2019) and Handelzalts (2019), the investigators required the cross-divisional groups to meet during personal time, outside school hours. Thus, while each of these studies added strength to the potential of cross-divisional collaboration, a blind spot existed in the literature around how school leaders could carry out cross-divisional practice without outside intervention.

Based on the promise of cross-divisional collaboration and the need to understand how school leaders can implement and sustain this style of sharing, this study's chief goal was investigating the conditions under which exemplar independent schools practice cross-divisional collaboration. Additionally, because no previous cross-divisional research involved independent schools, as a secondary aim this work sought to explore the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration in independent school communities. Two research questions guided this study's pursuit of the communicated objectives. First, *how* do independent schools practice cross-divisional collaboration, and second, *what* are the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration in independent schools?

To answer this study's research questions, the findings are split into three sections. The first two sections, *practice* and *leadership activity*, provide rich detail around *how* cross-divisional collaboration occurs at this study's two site schools. The third section, *outcomes*, illustrates the perceived consequences of cross-divisional sharing felt by the participants within each case-school.

Overall, the results of this study's cross-case synthesis revealed *addressing barriers, establishing a constructive culture,* and *investing in relationships* as the leadership activities key to establishing and maintaining successful cross-divisional collaboration in independent schools.

Furthermore, the data indicated that participants from each site perceived cross-divisional practice to lead to *connection* and *continual school improvement*.

Specifically, to mitigate the potential barriers of *proximity, time, and scope,* each site established formalized cross-divisional teams, provided faculty and staff time to meet within regular school hours, and set topics and foci around which collaborative groups could meet. Though each school's culture was drastically different from one another, the alignment of each site's established norms to its school mission appeared to promote each school's specific style of cross-divisional collaboration. Additionally, each sites' investment in relationships provided a foundation which eased and supported the leadership activities directly related to the schools' cross-divisional practices. Finally, within the context of independent schools, the improvement perceived by participants in this study appeared to follow an input, output relationship based on the shared foci established by the organizations, and the connection supported within the data linked faculty and staff both to one another and to the purpose of the school.

In the following sections, the case-specific themes from Davidson Prep and Centennial Day School are detailed, as well as the evidence adding deeper support for the critical cross-case patterns.

Practice

For this investigation, informed by DuFour and DuFour (2010), I defined collaborative practice as impactful interdependent sharing between educators leading to better results for their students, their team, and their school. Extending from this understanding of collaboration, I characterized cross-divisional collaboration as formal or informal sharing between faculty or staff of differing divisions of the school. Directed by these definitions, the emergent channels of cross-divisional practice at Centennial Day School and Davidson Prep are clarified below.

Davidson Prep: Practice

Two themes developed from the data around Davidson Prep's cross-divisional practice, *structured interactions* and *voluntary faculty and staff interactions.* Structured cross-divisional interactions are the collaborative exchanges at Davidson resulting directly from school policy or organizational structures. In contrast, voluntary interactions are collaborative discourses initiated by faculty or staff members. In the next two sections, the specific avenues of Davidson's structured and voluntary cross-divisional collaboration are detailed.

Structured Interactions. As this work will make clear, Davidson is deeply committed to intentional communication and connection. As such, several formalized means of cross-divisional collaboration exist within its school organization. Though collaborative practices, like administrator-level meetings and mentoring programs, are in place at Davidson Prep, the data supported *academic departments*, *cross-divisional committees, peer-observations,* and *in-school development* as the most widely exercised occurrences of cross-divisional collaboration.

Academic Departments. Arguably, the most prominent structure of cross-divisional collaboration at Davidson is its academic departments. Though Davidson divides its scholastic divisions into kindergarten (Grades K3-K5), elementary (Grades 1-5), middle school (Grades 6-8), and high school (Grades 9-12), the school's academic departments stretch from Grade 6 to Grade 12. Except for English, each academic area is overseen by a single, department chair who reports to the director of instruction and the high school principal. Due to recent curricular changes, the English department is supervised by two chairs to meet its newly expanded scope. William Payton, Davidson's high school principal and associate head of school, described the formalized department chair structures:

So, what we have done, we have intentionally empowered our department chairs to assist both administrators… meaning [the director of instruction] and myself, with what we have asked of them… meaning, how we plan, how we organize, how we communicate with parents, how we communicate with kids… be it how we communicate through our LMS [learning management system] … be it through email, but most importantly, what they post in learning management for our students.

As William eludes to above, through this highly-formalized department structure, Davidson's chairs act as extensions of formal leadership by communicating organizational expectations. This activity alone does not constitute cross-divisional collaboration. However, as formalized by their job description, department chairs also engage in several collaborative exchanges with their department-specific teachers, including cycles of feedback and support, conversations around academic goals, and evaluating potential curricular changes.

In addition to the middle and high school teachers meeting cross-divisionally during academic department meetings, multiple curriculum and transition meetings are scheduled throughout the year for elementary faculty to discuss student learning and curriculum alignment with their middle school and high school peers. Amy Martenson, Davidson's elementary school principal, noted the frequency of these types of interactions, stating, "Now the middle school and high school, the way that they're set up there, you know…they do that [department meetings] a whole lot. But, the elementary with our cross grade levels, there is usually a fall and spring." Even though these broader cross-divisional department meetings do not occur as frequently as their middle and high school counterparts, teachers reported their benefit, especially at academic transition points, like from fifth- to sixth-grade. Emily Polli, a middle school English teacher, reflected on this idea:

And so sometimes like the English department in the middle school and the high school

will meet with the elementary teachers who also taught English, and it was really

nice…especially when I taught sixth-grade because we met with like the fifth-grade

teachers, and so it was really helpful to kind of see the different things that they're

already learning… you know they [students] want to be like, "Oh, I never learned that,"

and you're like, "Yes, you did." So, it's really nice to… kind of talk to them about things

that they are doing in their classroom.

Cross-Divisional Committees. Like academic departments, cross-divisional committees

provide a critical avenue for sharing at Davidson Prep. According to case participants, Davidson

utilizes cross-divisional committees broadly across the school organization as a mechanism for

articulating academic initiatives, creating programmatic structures, and mapping change

opportunities. Reflecting on Davidson's use of committees, Cynthia Cole, the school's

kindergarten principal, joked, "my staff is on committees…we meet to talk about the

curriculum… any curriculum changes that we're thinking about making… any student activities

or anything like that. We have so many committees around here." In line with this study's focus,

leaders at Davidson Prep intentionally construct committees with cross-divisional representation.

David Clark, the school's director of instruction, explained, "Committees have always consisted

of across grade-levels. We've always had teachers from every grade-level, every school."

From the data, the numerous committees at Davidson Prep seemed to fit one of two

categories, *programmatic committees* or *instructional committees.* Instructional committees are

the faculty and staff teams at Davidson working towards expressing and aligning a specific

academic initiative. William Payton shared these committees frequently adopt a waterfall

framework, starting at the school's highest levels and then engaging each subsequent division to

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align the topic down through the organization. William asserted, "we did that [waterfall curriculum committees] with our communication skill, we did that with our reading comprehension, we, we've done that with our technology, and we did that with science as well."

Programmatic committees differ from instructional teams and involve faculty and staff collaborating and planning around organizational operations like professional development or the school's annual conference. The distinguishing characteristic between the instructional and programmatic committees is the former directly impacts classroom practice while the collaboration of the latter indirectly influences classroom activity. As an example of a programmatic committee's indirect effect on classroom practice, at the time of this study, the program committee involved with professional development was in the process of rolling out a new, more individualized model for teachers to request professional development.

Peer-Observation. Formal peer-observations represent a third way Davidson Prep engages its faculty in structured cross-divisional collaboration. At the kindergarten, middle, and high school levels, policy directs teachers to engage in peer-observations. Yet, the school's most defined structure of vertical peer-observations exists in the elementary school.

The year preceding this study, teachers in Davidson's elementary school were required to conduct three peer-observations, including one in the grade-level above and the grade-level below. Because of the added demand of COVID-19 and due to the division's lack of faculty turnover, the elementary principal amended the expectation to only two observations the year this study took place. Courtney Nichols, a first-grade teacher, described:

> Our principal likes for us to do two or three peer-observations where we can go and watch somebody… And so, a lot of us have gone to the grade-level below and the grade-

level above, and then we've got to go even into some higher ones [grades], and we can take away from that.

As a way of supporting teachers, Amy, the elementary principal, helps teachers connect with peers across divisional boundaries. Amy shared, "I worked with our kindergarten principal, and I set up times…for the first-grade teachers to go down to the kindergarten and for the kindergarten teachers to come up here. And, then we did the same with fifth-grade." In addition to helping teachers schedule time to complete their observations, Amy constructed a guide to scaffold the observation process for her faculty members.

In-School Development. The final way Davidson Prep provides formal pathways to cross-divisional collaboration is through in-school development opportunities. At Davidson, the school's case-data supported two patterns of in-house, cross-divisional professional development.

First, when teachers at Davidson attend external professional development, they are expected to share-out their knowledge when they return. In the kindergarten and elementary school divisions, these presentations are more insular in nature. However, as a consequence of Davidson's cross-divisional department structures, when teachers in the middle school and high school present, it is cross-divisional. David Clark explained, when time permits, teachers will present to the full-group of faculty members, but when several presentations need to be made, faculty will sign-up to attend one or two small group sessions:

We did it two ways… When teachers would come back from a conference, they would present… But they [the teachers] would come and do a presentation… and it might be a group of teachers like they went to this session… They wanted to present that so they would present to the group. Other times we divided into smaller groups, where they could

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choose, okay, go to this one or that one or that kind of thing. But for the most part, I think they came back and presented to the entire group.

The second way faculty experience cross-divisional development opportunities are mini-professional development sessions led by the faculty. According to participants, these mini-workshops provide opportunities for teachers to share classroom strategies or new relevant technology. Emily Polli reflected on the value of learning from her colleagues:

We [the teachers] obviously respect our principals, but it's just something about hearing it [professional development] from another teacher that I think teachers are more receptive to… that just because they're like, "okay, they're in the classroom, so, you know, they actually probably use this and do this." And so they're [teachers] more apt to listen.

In-school development, peer-observation, cross-divisional committees, and academic departments represent the means of formal cross-divisional sharing at Davidson Prep. In addition to formal exchanges, Davidson's faculty and staff regularly seek out their peers voluntarily.

Voluntary Faculty and Staff Interactions. A substantial amount of cross-divisional collaboration takes place organically between colleagues at Davidson Prep. Chris Taylor, a high school science teacher and the science department chair, explained:

So, you know, you asked me, how does it [cross-divisional collaboration] happen, we, you know, we're so intertwined that I don't really know if I can even answer that question because we're just, in our culture we're encouraged, you know, to, to link together.

From the data, the voluntary "linkages" between cross-divisional peers at Davidson Prep seem to occur either as *growth interactions* or *curriculum conversations.*

Growth Interactions. Growth interactions transpire when faculty or administrators exchange ideas with the purpose of refining their professional practice. For example, in her interview, Emily Polli praised her elementary colleagues' creativity and their advice in matters of classroom management. She recalled, "Like with behavior, I feel like…they have a lot of great ideas with, like dealing with discipline and behavior… they're just very, very creative… I'm not as creative as those elementary teachers are." As a whole, the case participants at Davidson supported growth interactions as commonplace throughout the school. Chris Taylor explained, "But, those conversations [cross-divisional conversations] exist on our campus, both at the administrative-level… and across… literally we will go downstairs, or go to another building, and ask [about instruction/content]." Amy Martenson reinforced Chris's statement, providing a direct example of a middle school faculty member seeking her advice as the elementary principal:

> It [cross-divisional collaboration] happens more naturally throughout, like teachers… I got an email from one of the middle school teachers saying they were looking at a different literature book. And I said, "Oh my goodness, we are too, what do you think?" There's a ton of that, that happens naturally. Really a ton.

Outside of conversations focused on professional growth, Davidson's faculty and staff frequently discuss the curriculum in voluntary conversation.

Curriculum Conversations. Curriculum interactions involve cross-divisional peers conferring around the alignment and execution of the curriculum. The data support the occurrence of these interactions at all levels of Davidson Prep.

Annie Reese, a K4 teacher at Davidson, explained curricular conversations allowed teachers "to work out things like overlaps [and] gaps." Courtney Nichols shared a similar perspective from her role in first-grade:

> we [first-grade teachers] try and focus on, like, what are the strengths that they [students] brought in [from kindergarten]. Then we're able to say, "okay…so this majority of the class struggled on counting money." So, then the kindergarten goes back, and they tell us things that they've done to count money, and then we talk about different ideas that might help.

Finally, as a middle school teacher, Emily Polli described her interactions with both the elementary and high school faculty, sharing, "it's really nice to meet with the lower grades sometimes because again, you can see where they're [the students] coming from, and how you need to grow them." And, she continued, "then in high school… It's nice to talk to some of them [teachers] because…you can kind of see different like responsibilities and things that they [students] need to be able to do when they get to that point."

At Davidson Prep, cross-divisional collaboration occurs through both formal structures and voluntary peer interactions. In the next section, the means of cross-divisional sharing at Centennial Day School are presented.

Centennial Day School: Practice

From the data, three themes developed around Centennial Day School's cross-divisional practice, *admin-level collaboration, ancillary faculty interactions,* and *school renewal.*

Admin-Level Collaboration. The division heads and director at Centennial day meet weekly, and according to Joseph Allen, the head of middle school, these meetings can be broad or very pointed depending on the school's current needs. However, the data made it clear that

Centennial's division heads actively engage in assisting each other by piloting and exploring new educational opportunities. Thom Washington, Centennial's head of high school, said, "You know if you think about how schools evolve and change, we can leverage each other's divisions, a little bit, 'like can you try this for us' and it works out." Mary Matthews, the head of lower school, echoed Thom's sentiment, "So when middle school has a thing, and they need something, I'm always willing to make that happen…I think that's really important." Examples from the data of division heads at Centennial working collectively to explore a common goal include piloting a gradeless evaluation system and structuring a mastery-based world language program.

Ancillary Faculty Interactions. During analysis, the data revealed a latent discrepancy between the intention of several cross-divisional structures at Centennial Day School and the faculty's actualized practice. Importantly, these ancillary structures, like the *academic department meetings, mentor program,* and *in-school development,* were not inconsequential to the organization overall. However, based on the accounts of case participants, the consistency in practice and significance applied to these structures was intermittent throughout the school organization, leading to the peripheral label assigned in this work.

For instance, Centennial Day's academic departments include middle school (Grades 5-8) and high school (Grades 9-12) faculty members. Additionally, like Davidson, the elementary faculty (Grades K-4) at Centennial join their middle and high school colleagues for multiple scheduled meetings during the year. However, several inconsistencies were reported in the interviews. One of the faculty participants shared:

> I feel a little bad that you're asking me like my department is notorious for like not
> sharing a ton. And we like don't have… like everybody else's meeting [department

meeting] is on Wednesday, like we probably… we'll have like one a year. Everyone else is like five.

Though other faculty participants did not articulate this sentiment as forthright as above, the data supported this disparity between intent and practice.

An excellent example of a strong program at Centennial which held isolated significance in the data is the school's mentoring program. At Centennial, the mentor program supports new faculty for their first two years in the organization. This program includes scheduled opportunities for mentees to meet and learn from their mentors, and also provides scheduled time for all mentees in the program to meet cross-divisionally with one another. In the school's most recent re-accreditation report, a third party committee commended the structure and support provided to new hires by Centennial's mentor program. However, in the context of cross-divisional collaboration, the head of middle school was the only participant to mention the school's mentoring structure as an example of cross-divisional sharing.

As will be made abundantly clear later in these findings, it is impossible to deny Centennial Day's devotion to educational growth. As a school organization, Centennial is resolutely committed to inquiry and pushing the field of education forward. However, like the mentoring program and academic departments, a gap materialized between the communicated importance of formal cross-divisional development and the message conveyed by faculty participants. Most notably, Centennial's division heads regularly cited in-school professional development as a cross-divisional opportunity for faculty. Conversely, the teacher participants focused on their informal interactions with colleagues and only brought up formal development when directly prompted.

Though in the data, inconsistencies prevailed regarding the cross-divisional programs discussed above, every participant identified *school renewal* as Centennial's primary means of cross-divisional collaboration.

School Renewal. From a high level, the process of school renewal at Centennial Day groups faculty and staff in cross-divisional teams to investigate a pre-determined topic of interest and make recommendations for formal school leaders to consider. Zach Keller, a middle school faculty member and the sixth-grade team lead, described, "every year we sort of decide as a faculty on a variety of topics that are worth our time discussing, and ultimately make a recommendation towards as a school."

The theoretical groundings of Centennial's school renewal procedures are rooted in the work of John Goodlad (1984). In his seminal book, *A Place Called School*, Goodlad (1984) presented several recommendations he felt would evolve American education. Stemming from Goodlad's (1984) lifetime of academic experiences and an in-depth investigation involving 38 schools and 13 educational communities, Goodlad's (1984) recommendations covered a broad scope of schooling, including ideas such as: dividing large schools into smaller "house" units, developing a non-tenure specific pay scale for teachers, implementing headmasters or headmistresses to facilitate curricular alignment between elementary, middle, and high school chains, and decentralizing authority to more precisely address the needs of individual school sites.

Embedded within Goodlad's (1984) proposal to decentralize authority was the idea that schools should implement a system to autonomously address issues of specific significance to their site:

The guiding principle being put forward here is that the school must become largely self-directing. The people connected with it must develop a capacity for effecting renewal and establish mechanisms for doing this. Then, if drug use emerges as a problem, these mechanisms of self-renewal can be used to attack it. If children's reading attainments appear to be declining, improved reading will become a top priority item on the school renewal agenda. (Goodlad, 1984, p. 276)

Of note, Goodlad (1984) contextualized his renewal proposal with several other recommendations on the distribution of power and accountability at the state and district levels, which made school renewal more feasible.

Centennial's director, Robert Alligood, described the fundamental ideas of school renewal in his interview, stating:

But the idea [of school renewal] was that the ideas… The best opportunities for reforming your school are already in your school… like, they're not going to come from some blue-ribbon commission or, you know, some planning process that involves everybody but the teachers.

And, though Goodlad's (1984) ideas have been around for decades, few, if any, other independent schools in the country practice his renewal framework. Robert shared, "I've looked around trying to find somebody else doing it. And there's some reference to some stuff happening in Virginia… a few years ago, but really basically nothing."

In Figure 6, the "established mechanisms" (Goodlad, 1984) of Centennial Day's school renewal process are outlined. In the succeeding section, I provide brief detail for each stage of Centennial's school renewal cycle.

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Figure 6

Centennial Day: School Renewal Process
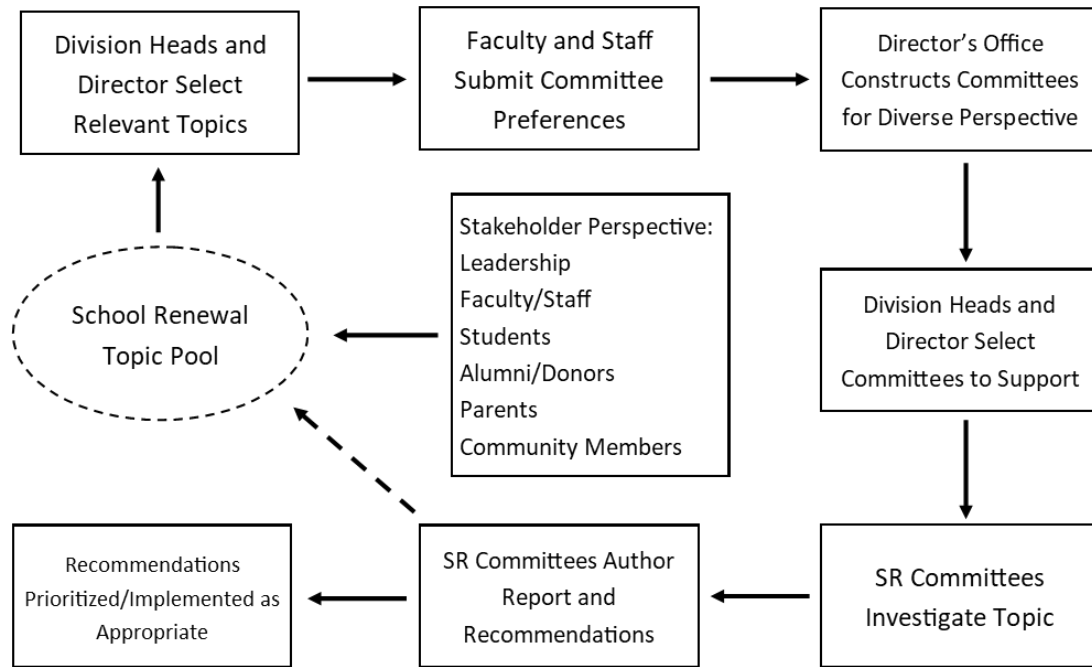
School Renewal: Process. The first phase of school renewal involves either "crowdsourcing" or crafting topics of interest the director and division heads feel are beneficial for the school to investigate. Though this brainstorming process takes place at the formal leadership level, school renewal ideas can emerge from any stakeholder associated with the school. According to Robert, school renewal suggestions are commonplace at Centennial, and he shared, "it just became like you'd be… it could be in conversation… and then some idea would come up, and 'oh, that should be school renewal.'"

In school renewal's second phase, the division heads and director refine the pool of ideas into a final list of 12 to 14 committee topics. Examples of recent school renewal topics include: *Measuring and Communicating Student Progress and Mastery, Harmonizing the Lower, Middle, and High School Schedules, Gender in Schools, K-12 World Language,* and *Grading for Equity.*

Once topics are selected, the director's office sends a survey to all faculty and staff, asking respondents to indicate their top-three school renewal choices and whether or not they would be willing to chair a team. The director's office then uses the collected survey data to construct committees balanced for experience, demographics, and division representation. Robert indicated this step is especially crucial to diversifying committee perspective and reducing unnecessary bias:

> So, if you let people decide what committee they're going to serve on, you get a
>
> confirmation bias because, like there's some people that would be on the like, you know,
>
> the green the school committee, like every single year. So, you've got to be careful.

After the committees are assigned, the division heads and director select a number of committees to support during the process.

The "meat" of school renewal is the actual inquiry and collaboration. During this time, faculty and staff meet monthly to carry out and discuss their investigation. Ultimately, each group's goal is to author a report that includes their research methods, historical data, a set of findings, and ideally, a list of recommendations for the school to consider. Thom Washington summarized these steps, declaring, "And out of that school renewal process… We'll spend the year kind of in a study or inquiry. And it should produce a set of either questions, or preferably a set of three to five action items for the school." Of note, the scope of some topics exceeds the capacity of a single school year. When this occurs, a committee either rolls over into the next year (e.g., K-12 World Languages), or its recommendations feed the pool of potential ideas for the following school renewal cycle (e.g., Building Pathways to Teaching).

In the final phase of school renewal, faculty and staff review the overall bank of recommendations and, through a poll, prioritize those they feel are most important to the school.

As an example of a well-supported recommendation of renewal, Robert shared, "last time around, the two…highest were to make more progress on a faculty that looks more like our student body… like we're 40 percent kids of color, but only about 20 percent faculty… And…a curriculum audit, you know, for inclusion."

At Centennial Day, school renewal unquestionably serves as the leading mechanism of cross-divisional collaboration. Outside of school renewal, Centennial's division heads regularly collaborate, especially to aid other divisions in exploring new ideas. At the faculty level, several structures are in place to guide sharing and development. However, due to inconsistencies across the school, these other structures are best described as ancillary in nature.

In the next section, the thematic pattern in practice resulting from the synthesis of Davidson Prep and Centennial Day is considered.

Cross-Case Synthesis: Practice

The thematic pattern in practice developed from the synthesis of Davidson Prep and Centennial Day is the importance of *formal teams.* At Centennial Day, the patterns of relationships reinforce the importance of school renewal structures. As Allison Riley stated, "So, there is something nice about having it [school renewal] like it does force the collaboration… I don't really know my colleagues in lower school. I know the ones I'm on a school renewal with…I appreciate that quite a bit." Additionally, Joseph Allen, Centennial's head of middle school, indicated without the formalized scheduling and teaming, he was not sure how any K-12 interactions would happen. He shared, "we have a calendar we put together in the summer…which indicates when we're going to have cross-divisional meetings… So, that's kind of the mechanical part to it… but it's pretty significant…without the time set aside, it just wouldn't happen."

At Davidson Prep, even though a considerable amount of cross-divisional collaboration occurs informally, formal structures are critical. Reflecting on her first year at Davidson and her efforts trying to implement peer-observations, Amy Martenson recalled, "my first year I encouraged it [peer-observation] …and, you know what happened, it didn't." Now that Amy has reinforced peer-observation with formalized structures, the practice appears to lead to additional voluntary sharing between colleagues. Amy expressed, "I don't require them to sit and have a conversation with the other person [after observations]…But, most of them really did." Furthermore, at Davidson, the formal structures of cross-divisional collaboration are a way of supporting and connecting teachers, as Chris Taylor stated:

> We're intentional. We don't… we don't throw a teacher in a classroom and go, "okay, your job is to teach English 1." Because we can't do that. You're not a man or woman on the island because you know what you're teaching webs out into the rest of the curriculum…So, no one is on an island.

Perhaps most indicative of the importance of formalized cross-divisional teams is what occurs when they are unexpectedly dissolved. As I have stated several times throughout this work, this study took place during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Because of the Pandemic, Centennial Day made the organizational decision to put its school renewal program on hold. According to Robert, the school's director, without school renewal, Centennial grew far more segmented. In response to COVID's impact on cross-divisional collaboration, Robert poignantly stated, "Yeah, COVID has trashed all that [the usual collaborative culture], you know, we're all really insular."

Previous studies focused on cross-divisional collaboration relied on unsustainable scheduling and fiscal means to implement and study the practice (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016;

Handelzalts, 2019; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019). In the next section, the leadership activities revealed to foster regular cross-divisional sharing within the real-world contexts of this study's site schools are discussed.

Leadership Activity

Revealing the leadership activities that foster cross-divisional collaboration was the second tier in this study's goal of understanding *how* the practice occurs in independent schools. This portion of the research was critical because its answer directly addressed the previously purported gap in the literature.

For this study, I viewed leadership through a distributive leadership lens, which asserts, "leadership involves the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 24). The above definition of leadership situates leadership as an activity rather than a person. Thus, I carried out this investigation under the assumption that formal and teacher leaders both held a level of capacity for fostering cross-divisional collaboration in their schools.

The leadership activities that emerged from this study's case synthesis as most responsible for encouraging cross-divisional collaboration were *addressing barriers, establishing a constructive culture,* and *investing in relationships.* Before discussing these identified cross-case patterns, the site-specific findings from Davidson Prep and Centennial Day are detailed.

Davidson Prep: Leadership Activity

Three central leadership-themes developed from Davidson Prep's case-data as essential activities directly responsible for cross-divisional collaboration, *setting and upholding clear expectations, mitigating cross-divisional barriers,* and *establishing a "we" belief.* In addition to

these three primary themes, *investing in relationships* emerged as a practice strengthening Davidson's capacity for each of the above leadership activities. Before covering each theme in detail, I provide some context around Davidson's leadership focus.

At Davidson Prep, a substantial number of the leadership activities observed in the data stem from the abrupt health failures of the school's previous head. William Payton, Davidson's second most tenured principal, recalled the significance of the situation:

> He [the former head of school] took over the school as the head of school, and he was here for 20 years, and he was an incredible leader of our school. And he hired me. And we actually, we knew…. We knew he was going to transition out okay, but we all got thrown a curveball by his health. His health went down and deteriorated quicker than we thought. And, we moved into a time of, while we knew we were transitioning…we got forced to transition faster than we expected. And, it was at that point in time that we all really opened our eyes to the fact of… this could happen to any of us at any moment. And, what happens to the school? So, out of that [deteriorating health of our head] …opening everybody's eyes to the reality that this could occur. We wanted to create a place where it's bigger than all of us. And, we wanted to ensure that the high-quality, Christian education that we have worked so diligently to create continues along this pathway when we're all gone.

As this section will clarify, out of a desire to safeguard their school's academic legacy, the faculty and administrators at Davidson are incredibly intentional about their practice. In the context of the school's cross-divisional collaboration, it all begins with a clearly defined vision.

Setting and Upholding Clear Expectations. Setting and upholding expectations involves communicating defined standards to all school stakeholders and supporting

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organizational members in "rising" to the expectations set before them. In the data, participants

expressed the balance of standards and support as *articulating expectations* and *open honest*

communication.

  Articulating Expectations. According to the messages within the data, the formal leaders

at Davidson Prep set and communicate a comprehensive vision for their school. Participants'

accounts revealed the strategic areas most closely tied to the school's practice of cross-divisional

collaboration as *communication, professional development,* and *professionalism.*

  Communication is not only a part of Davidson's overall vision, it is a strategic goal

articulated in the school's development framework. Charles Gaines, Davidson's head of school,

described the rationale for the school's intent communication focus:

> Well again, the principals, the division heads, are very in tune, and very involved … you
>
> realize pretty early on… with the texting and the one-to-one and all that stuff, that
>
> students weren't communicating like they should be… So, then it became a process of
>
> how do we teach our students to continue to communicate… as God intended them to…
>
> so, we started just putting all of those things in line… it's just kind of common sense.

To clarify its communication initiative, Davidson formed a cross-divisional committee to align

the communication efforts throughout the school. In addition to being cemented in the school's

strategic plan, elements of the communication initiative, like collaboration and professional

relationships, are embedded in Davidson's *Characteristics of Professional Excellence.* In

reference to the school's communication standards, Courtney Nichols conveyed, "My principal

and [the head of school] are amazing, and they set the expectations, very, very high, and one of

those is collaboration across the school."

A second area in which Charles Gaines is directly responsible for escalating the school's strategic ambition is professional growth. According to David Clark, the director of instruction, "Now [the head of school] said several years ago. 'So, look, I want to, I want to build in a very strong teacher professional development budget.' And so, we started going to conferences." William Payton added, "Now, that [culture of instructional support] comes from [the head of school]'s leadership style. That comes from his commitment to constant professional development. That is the huge shift." And, as Chris Taylor shared, the commitment to development was a genuine change for Davidson's community, asserting, "Well, let me say this to you first of all….when I got here, I was amazed at how internal our eyes were as opposed to external." As will be discussed later, so much of the energy that initially aided teachers in stepping out of their divisional silos came directly from Charles's vision and the resulting professional growth opportunities.

The final vision area fostering cross-divisional collaboration at Davidson Prep is professionalism, which the school defines in its Characteristics of Professional Excellence. As I briefly mentioned above, the Characteristics of Professional Excellence set collaborative expectations for Davidson Prep's faculty and staff. However, the Characteristics also include set standards for professional growth, spirituality, servitude, collegiality, and student-centeredness. The comprehensive definition of professionalism established by the Characteristics is published in the school handbooks, on the school's website, and is covered as a part of new faculty training. While each area of Davidson's professionalism model arguably encourages cross-divisional interactions, unwavering commitment to student learning was mentioned most frequently in the data as a reason teachers sought the advice of cross-divisional peers. William Payton declared, "And, their [teachers] focus is on constantly evaluating how we can do things

better, for the betterment of the, of the students, not for the betterment of the faculty or themselves even."

Open Honest Communication. Open and honest sharing is encouraged at all levels of Davidson Prep and is a critical component to maintaining the school's expectations. Annie Reese, a K4 teacher, expressed, "I think that's very important to have that culture of being able to be open and honest, and I can tell you it was not… always that way…We have really grown in that area." Amy, the elementary principal, reflected on the shallow nature of faculty interactions when she first arrived at Davidson:

> Um, I think that we were kind of a comfortable collaborative, where they [the teachers] would talk, but it was only the warm fuzzies… that if they thought a grade below or above them wasn't doing what they thought, they didn't feel comfortable to say what they thought… it would be too critical of things. And so, really getting them to trust each other and to trust the process was definitely… [a big change].

The case-data revealed that Davidson's leaders *modeled* and *provided safe environments* to advance more open sharing between faculty.

Modeling open honest sharing took place in two directions within the data, with leaders demonstrating receiving feedback as much as they gave it. Chris Taylor recollected his early interactions with David Clark, the director of instruction, declaring "he was so good about hearing teachers, no matter. I mean, he and I would argue… in a professional way… And, that's a credit to [David], because [he] wanted to hear those conversations because that's what he does." When providing teachers feedback, leaders at Davidson do so with honesty and care. Emily Polli spoke about her interactions with her most direct supervisors:

And also I think, just like every time that I talked to him [high school principal] about something or not just him, but my, my middle school principal… [the director of instruction]… they're just very… what's the word, they're always very, very encouraging and they, they want to help me find the right answer.

In addition to modeling the expectation of giving and receiving honest communication, leaders at Davidson Prep establish open sharing by providing a safe environment and scaffolding interactions when necessary. Amy Martenson shared that she would sit in on conversations when teachers required extra guidance, understanding teacher dynamics could impact their willingness to share. Amy said, "And then creating a safe environment because some teachers are more apt to share than others and some teachers…are more critical than others. So, you have to be super-mindful…that it's an honest, professional conversation." From the high school perspective, William Payton added, "You know, all conversations happen behind a closed door…Never in the hallway. Never in the classroom. Never in front of the kids, for sure. Never in front of another peer. These are private conversations."

As a result of leadership's investment in open and honest communication, the data supports an environment of wide-spread and caring accountability, and a faculty comfortable providing open and honest feedback. Courtney Nichols reflected on a recent conversation with a neighboring grade-level team, sharing, "But, we've got a…team that's young, and they're working really hard on open communication. With, 'okay, we don't like this.' Okay. I'm like, 'go talk to them, talk to them…Be honest.' You cannot go wrong when you're honest."

Speaking to the now established culture of professional communication, William asserted, "everybody understands that part of the excellence here is that we have to be able to speak truth to one another, and it's not personal." William continued, "But, that [open

communication] didn't happen overnight. It was a constant culture of expectation, clear expectation, and accountability. It's expectations with accountability that sets us apart."

Mitigate Cross-Divisional Barriers. The limited literature on cross-divisional collaboration highlights several barriers to its practice, including scope, proximity, and a lack of common meeting time (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Handelzalts, 2019; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Tanenbaum et al., 2017; Trabona et al., 2019). Additionally, the data from this study demonstrated that teachers at Davidson needed motivation to overcome the vulnerability of cross-divisional sharing. This finding aligns with the obstacles cited in peer-observation research (Carrol & O'Loughlin, 2014; Sandt, 2012) and the "learning anxiety" presented in the change theory literature (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Schein, 2017). As demonstrated in the data, leaders at Davidson reduce the impact of each of these collaborative barriers by *providing a shared focus, establishing collaborative structures, time management,* and *energizing a growth mindset.*

Providing a Shared Focus. Two school-wide initiatives provide the primary foci for cross-divisional conversations at Davidson Prep, *curriculum mapping* and *goal setting.*

As was discussed in the *practice* section, a considerable amount of cross-divisional collaboration at Davidson focuses on curriculum alignment and execution. However, like open and honest sharing, curriculum mapping took time and effort to implement to the level it presently exists at Davidson. As Chris Taylor recalled, "curriculum mapping used to be Word documents printed and thrown in a box. And that's kind of where we were …then all of a sudden we started really caring about, you know, being intentional about what we're trying to do." Updating the curriculum mapping was one of David Clark's responsibilities when Davidson Prep hired him. In fact, before David, the director of instruction position did not exist. Courtney Nichols thought back to the start of Davidson's intentional mapping process:

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What's funny about mapping is it was literally the scariest thing we've ever heard. I

mean, [the director of instruction], bless his heart, he comes in, and he's like, "you've got

to do this, this, this, this…it's going to take eight hours to do," …and all of us were like,

"nobody has eight hours. What are you talking about?" And it was great.

At the time of this study, the kindergarten division used detailed curriculum matrices to

align their curriculum, and as a part of the change process, elementary through high school

adopted Rubicon Atlas to map their curricula virtually. Emily Polli stated, "[The director of

instruction] did a great job of trying to get everyone to, you know, to talk to everyone with our

mapping. So, our mapping has come a really long way."

According to the participants, the evolved curriculum maps serve as an organizational

through line around which cross-divisional peers can collaborate. Amy Martenson said it this

way, "And, we've done some mapping…which has really helped…because you've got it right

there… and it [the conversation] is not a this is what I think, it is this is what I see in the map."

Chris Taylor passionately added:

And what is really facilitated a lot of those cross-divisional, you know, conversations and

actions, was the fact that we are intentional about our mapping of our curriculum… that

has been the key, um, because if you don't map your curriculum. It's basically

hearsay…So, the mapping piece, I cannot emphasize that enough.

The second focal point of Davidson's cross-divisional collaboration is the school's goal

setting. Each division at Davidson Prep takes a slightly different approach to setting goals, but, a

commonality is each approach is cascaded beneath the strategic goals of the school. At the high

school and middle school levels, goal setting occurs cross-divisionally through the academic

departments. Chris Taylor explained this umbrella approach to goals:

So, it starts at the department head level and the administration because that's when we

compare on sort of a global level, you know, "hey Miss English department head, what

are you guys doing about blah, blah, blah, blah?" And, it starts there. So, it begins with

those conversations at the department level.

At the elementary school level, Amy Martenson, the elementary principal, implemented a

goal setting form that lists the communicated divisional goals and then prompts each teacher to

create a goal with their grade-level team and an individual goal. According to Courtney Nichols,

goal setting has "absolutely" impacted sharing:

Absolutely, absolutely [goal setting has impacted sharing]. She [the elementary principal]

has high expectations for us. And she again is open and honest and transparent, so you're

going to know one way or the other… If she expects this for me because you've told her

you're going to do it, then you're expected to do it, and you want to.

Providing a shared focus through mapping and goal setting helps Davidson Prep limit the

potential impact of scope on cross-divisional collaboration. To overcome issues of proximity,

Davidson provides its faculty and staff formalized structures.

Collaborative Structures. Collaborative structures create formal teams in which faculty

and staff can collaborate cross-divisionally. Many of Davidson's formalized cross-divisional

structures like academic departments, committees, and peer-observation, were already discussed

in detail in the *practice* section above. However, one sub-theme of collaborative structures at

Davidson has not yet been presented, *leveraging appropriate technology.*

Primarily at Davidson's faculty level, technology is utilized to span cross-divisional gaps

when a "walk down the hall" is simply not feasible. Emily Polli described Davidson's shift in

technology usage, reflecting on her arrival at the school:

When I first got here. I literally was handed a piece of paper that was like some table with like what they were doing [in this course]. I had no, I mean, I literally felt like I had to start from scratch because they were just not there yet. And so, we went from this piece of paper on a Microsoft like a… just a document. To now being on Atlas and doing everything on Drive [Google Drive].

Emily shared that Google Drive, in particular, helped teachers reach across divisional lines and work more collaboratively. As examples of Google's usage, just ahead of this study, Emily's English department carried out an assessment audit using Google Drive, and Emily and a high school colleague were able to prepare a professional development workshop without ever leaving their classrooms.

In addition to Atlas and Google Drive, teachers regularly utilize email, text apps, and social media to share ideas and seek advice. Courtney Riley addressed teachers' open-usage of communicative technology:

It [collaboration] could be like I said, a walk down the hall, a text message, "Oh wait, I saw this," or, "my class is struggling on this, what did y'all do for this?" We're in a good situation where we can, everybody has their own, their cell numbers and we text or we'll put it in GroupMe, and everybody you know adds into [it]. It's very open communication like we were talking about.

Time Management. In the literature, researchers regularly identified time as the single greatest barrier to cross-divisional collaboration (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Tanenbaum et al., 2017). Davidson's leaders work to mitigate time constraints through *scheduling, class coverage,* and acting with an awareness of teachers' *strategic capacities.*

According to participants, Davidson Prep has tried multiple strategies to meet the scheduling needs of collaboration. William Payton recounted the school's former efforts to schedule parallel meetings before and after school:

> So, what we did five, six years ago was we started having two sets of faculty meetings. We'd have one before school the coaches would come to. We have one after school the rest of the teachers would come to. It wasn't useful. Different message, not enough time. They [the teachers] weren't, they weren't getting to interact with the other classroom leaders.

Ultimately, the solution Davidson found most productive was to schedule a series of late arrival days for students throughout the school year and, while the students were away, provide teachers meeting time during regular school hours. Amy Martenson articulated the importance of the late starts:

> Our teachers, you know, a lot of our teachers have young children, or they're coaching or doing things after school, and so they figured out that if we were going to do these things, we were going to have to find time in the school day to make it happen… that requiring teachers to come before school started or staying late was, um, not going to really support them and build that investment.

In response to the demands of the COVID-19 Pandemic, Davidson shifted their late starts to a series of early releases. As an unforeseen consequence of the switch, the faculty now have even larger blocks of time to meet. David Clark said, "Now this year, because again, because of COVID, we could not do the late starts because of managing kids. So, that's why we went to early dismissals… now we do have more time." For the academic year in which this study took place, Davidson scheduled six early release days across the school year.

When meeting during early release time is not possible, leaders at Davidson are open and willing to provide class coverage for teachers to meet. In the middle and high school divisions, William Payton reported he would leverage both faculty members and substitutes to cover classes. He shared, "I'll do both. I'll bring in subs [to cover classes]. If I can cover it within the faculty, I'll cover it within the faculty, they don't mind covering for one another." In fact, as a way of incentivizing teachers to cover classes for one another, Davidson added language to its leave policy for teachers in the middle and high school to earn additional leave time if they cover class periods. The policy states, "In the middle/high school, each time a teacher covers six (6) class periods for his/her peers, he/she will accumulate one (1) additional sick leave day." According to the policy's language, accrued sick days can then be used, traded in for personal time at a rate of 2:1, carried over into the subsequent school year, or paid out. Though this policy does not apply directly to elementary or kindergarten faculty, the practice of class coverage occurs in those divisions as well.

During her first interview, Amy Martenson reported she would often cover classes when no other teachers are available, especially to help facilitate vertical peer-observations. During Courtney Nichols's interview, I asked her directly about this practice, and she happily responded, "I mean, like right now [Amy] 's in my room. So, like for me to do this [the interview]. She came in and watched my classes. She's willing to help whenever she can."

Managing teachers' strategic capacities is the final way leaders at Davidson Prep address the restrictions imposed on faculty by time. Strategic capacity refers to the rate of demand on a teacher's limited quantity of time. At Davidson, leaders set high expectations for teachers but act with extreme consideration when asking teachers to part with any more of their time. As the

husband of a former teacher, William Payton explained he is hyper-aware of the professional

demand asked of his teachers:

 I'm very sensitive… part of it's because I'm married to a former teacher…And so, I'm

 very sensitive to how much time is required of a faculty member at our school outside of

 the normal school day. Because I do think every school is tough. But, because of some of

 the initiatives that we have in place, whenever I ask of something out of them [teachers]

 outside of what I'm already asking, I'm sensitive of, I've put another rock in the

 backpack. So, where do I take one out?

As a self-proclaimed "mover and shaker," Amy Martenson focuses heavily on the pace of any

change efforts and keeps teachers informed, as to not overstretch their capacities:

 Um, and really monitoring change, and change is good, but too much change too fast can

 really kill a culture. Um, trying to always be proactive and really systematically think

 through a change and take changes real slow, and when I have a change on my heart to

 really kind of communicate with my teachers.

 Energizing a Growth Mindset. The final barrier of cross-divisional collaboration at

Davidson is teacher insecurity. Within the data, encouraging the adoption of a growth mindset

was a key way for teachers at Davidson to step out of their comfort zones with cross-divisional

sharing. Amy Martenson addressed the desire for a growth mindset head-on:

 And then having those really fluid conversations with each other on what they're

 growing on, and not seeing it as a weakness, but just, you know, the Carol Dweck

 [growth mindset] … "this is an area I rock at, this is an area that I super want to… I see

 myself growing at… who are all the people in this school [that I can learn from] that rock

 at that?"

As I eluded to previously, Davidson's head of school's vision and commitment to professional development thrust the faculty towards a mindset shift. Specifically, in the data, participants frequently praised the energizing effect of two development experiences, Ron Clark and Davidson launching a professional development conference.

As part of its commitment to professional development, Davidson Prep invested in sending nearly every faculty member to the Ron Clark Academy over a period of a few years. Emily Polli recalled how motivating and inspiring the Ron Clark experience was for some teachers at Davidson:

> And I think really just, especially the older teachers, they were like, wow, like this [Ron Clark] is amazing. I mean, I had an older teacher that I used to teach with. She's still in the sixth-grade. And she went, and just was like on fire for teaching again after being there just because she saw all these things that they were doing. And they were things that she was like, I could easily do this, but just never really thought about it maybe.

Additionally, in direct reference to teacher vulnerability and development, David Clark shared:

> So, there were some of those natural barriers [teacher vulnerability]. But, I think once we got into it, those kind of went away. And saying, wow, this is really good stuff. And I'm personally seeing the benefits of it. So, I just don't think we had that many barriers [to cross-divisional collaboration]. Our teachers were open to learn…they want to grow. And I think Ron Clark just kind of knocked a lot of those barriers down.

As faculty attended more conferences and gained greater confidence in their ability to teach others, the idea emerged that the school should host a conference. In partnership with another school in the southeast, Davidson developed and hosted a two-day conference on its

campus. The conference was an "all-hands" effort led by David Clark and Amy Martenson. David outlined the format:

> And, the way these conferences work, and it was [partner school]'s idea…was that they were live classrooms. So, we would bring teachers in, and they would sit around and watch a teacher actively teach a lesson. And, they were just… supposedly invisible, and it really worked out extremely well. And then the kids would leave, and they would debrief.

According to David, Davidson's faculty hosted 30 to 40 percent of the sessions the conference's first year and an even greater number presented in the conference's second year. Charles Gaines described the confidence that resulted from Davidson's conference, declaring, "I think our teachers were a little bit nervous about doing that [the conference] and presenting, but once they did, man, their confidence just grew."

Establish a "We" Belief. Establishing a "we" belief refers to the embodied group identity at Davidson Prep in which faculty and staff prioritize the success of the school organization and its members over personal ambitions. As a consequence of its established group culture, the figurative walls, which sometimes materialize between academic divisions within independent schools, appear to dissolve (Royal, 2015). As Emily Polli stated, "I don't know, it's the craziest thing, but it is really true [we don't feel siloed]."

Though establishing a "we" belief is closely related to mitigating cross-divisional barriers, the former largely establishes the conditions of Davidson's voluntary cross-divisional exchanges, where the latter mainly involves the school's formalized structures. Three leader activities underlie Davidson's "we" belief, *reinforcing family, investing in the success of others,* and *empowering.*

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Reinforce Family. During the interview process, every case participant at Davidson Prep described the school's culture as a "family." Davidson's leaders reinforce this cultural ideal explicitly through numerous documents and school artifacts (e.g., faculty and student handbooks, strategic plan, new hire training) and by modeling the culture, especially from the school's highest level. According to Cynthia Cole, the kindergarten principal, "[the head of school] is very good about connecting… like he can tell you every one of my family members and what they're doing… You know, it's just amazing." Emily Polli echoed Charles Gaines's commitment to personal connection, "He's the head of the school and still, you know, he still comes by our rooms like probably once or twice a week, just to say, 'hey,' and just to see how we're doing."

Invest in the Success of Others. A second way leaders reinforce Davidson's "we" belief is by actively investing in the success of others. William Payton spoke pointedly about his commitment to lifting his faculty, declaring, "It's [leadership] about making the organization better. And so, how can we [help you] … we didn't hire you, for you not to be successful here." In fact, as I shared above, Davidson articulates serving colleagues as one of its Characteristics of Professional Excellence. Specifically, the document states, "Each Davidson Prep teacher will demonstrate a servant's heart…The teacher will consistently demonstrate a supportive, nurturing, mentoring, and empathetic mindset with respect to his or her professional and student relationships." Courtney Nichols described the investment in others as a team culture, where teachers are not competitive with one another. She continued to clarify, "And we're very… we try really hard to put others in front of us and, and give a shout out where shout outs are due; give credit, where credit is due."

Empower Others. The last leadership activity which seems to reinforce Davidson's overall "we" belief is empowering others. Empowerment at Davidson occurs through both

delegation and affirmation. As the leader formally responsible for so much of the school's day-to-day functions, William Payton admitted it was initially a challenge for him to "give up the reigns." Yet, he also shared, now, he has the "utmost confidence" in the team of teacher leaders he currently has in place.

At the highest level of Davidson, Charles Gaines was quick to express sincere appreciation and gratitude for the work of others, attesting, "My B ring people are fantastic, and they're all of the same mindset…and they're excited. You've seen how excited they are and how passionate they are about what they're doing." Finally, Amy Martenson shared the appreciation she held for her teachers' perspectives, "I hardly make any decision without, especially curriculum wise or professional development…I really don't make any of those changes without talking them through with my teachers."

Investing in Relationships. A final leadership theme at Davidson developed as a foundation for all other leadership activity, a steadfast and explicit investment in *building relationships*. Like so many of the other leadership activities at Davidson, investing in relationships was modeled from the top of the school organization. In his interview, Charles Gaines reflected on his investment in relationships:

> Um, you know…part of it [building relationships], is who I am. You know my personality. I've always been good at developing relationships with people. And, that's basically sitting and talking with people and respecting them and who they are, and learning who they are, and learning what their talents are, what their gifts are, and the best way to utilize those.

Though, according to Charles, building relationships came naturally, investing in relationships is openly stated as a priority in the Characteristics of Professional Excellence and was

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communicated as a leadership priority by all principals in this study. Within the context of this work, Davidson's relational investment served as a stable footing for open communication, overcoming cultural barriers, and establishing the school's shared identity.

As William Payton described earlier in this section, "It's expectations with accountability that sets us apart." However, before holding teachers accountable, William also conveyed that he first invests in the person, "I can't be critical of you… I can't call you out to better things until you realize that I'm doing that out of a place of wanting to lift you… as opposed to wanting to belittle you." Amy Martenson echoed this idea, "I spend a lot of time investing in relationships, to where now, I can have those conversations [honest conversations]."

In addition to building relationships to facilitate more productive conversations, Davidson's leaders also establish a relational culture before making any programmatic changes for teachers. Amy Martenson was the least tenured division head in Davidson's case group, and she recalled, "'we've always done that'… I heard that a lot [when I got here]. But, I took the time to get to know everyone [before making any changes]." According to Amy, investing in relationships eased the implementation of her goal setting and peer-observation models, two structures critical to cross-divisional collaboration at Davidson's elementary level.

Finally, investing in relationships underscored the school's "we" culture, where, as William declared, faculty and staff are valued for far more than their role at the school. He asserted, "We are so much more than just teachers here… my English teacher… my math teacher… they're so much more than just teachers here… that the relationship building we have established here allows us to have those conversations."

Leaders at Davidson Prep play a vital role in fostering a climate in which cross-divisional collaboration can openly take place. The three leadership themes which materialized from the

analysis of Davidson's case-data were, setting and upholding clear expectations, mitigating

barriers, and establishing a "we" belief. Each of these three leadership areas was aided or

enhanced by Davidson's foundational commitment to relationships and community. In the next

section, the leadership activities most responsible for cross-divisional practice at Centennial Day

are discussed.

Centennial Day School: Leadership Activity

Centennial Day's history traces back to the early 1900s when it served as a laboratory

school for a major university in the southeastern United States, and the school's roots of inquiry

and research still run deep. As Thom Washington, Centennial's head of high school, shared, the

presence of the university is a constant reminder of the school's foundation:

> But being in the shadows of a major research institution like that… I think we can't help
>
> but benefit from breathing that air. About the desire to produce, not only like young
>
> scholars but also like it's on us to advance education, like it has to be on us to do that.
>
> That's in our DNA.

As will be made clear in this section, Centennial's commitment to progressive education and

innovation profoundly impacts the school's leadership activity. Revealed in the analysis, the

three leadership themes crucial to Centennial's cross-divisional collaboration include *mitigating*

barriers, de-centering individual leaders, and reinforcing the school as a *learning organization.*

In addition to the three leadership themes above, *cultivating stakeholder trust* appeared as an

underlying theme, strengthening Centennial's ability to foster its creative culture.

Mitigating Barriers. As has already been expressed, several barriers to cross-divisional

collaboration exist in the literature (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Handelzalts, 2019; Suh &

Seshaiyer, 2015; Tanenbaum et al., 2017; Trabona et al., 2019). At Centennial Day, the case-data

supported *collaborative structures, scheduling, shared focus,* and *modeling successful collaboration* as leadership themes tempering cross-divisional obstacles. Because Centennial's collaborative structures, most notably school renewal, were already presented in detail, this section focuses on the three additional avenues of barrier mitigation at Centennial Day School.

  Scheduling. Scheduling is the most direct way leaders overcome time as a cross-divisional barrier at Centennial Day School. According to Joseph Allen, the activity of scheduling occurs each summer and outlines when teachers will have time to meet in mentee groups, departments, divisions, and school renewal teams. He shared, "So, all those meetings I just mentioned are put, put on a calendar before the year starts, so we make sure that we've got, you know, we've got time dedicated for those conversations." The criticality of scheduling was not lost at the faculty level, and Zach Keller reported it as one of the essential leadership activities in the school overall. "The biggest stuff that they [formal leaders] do involves scheduling… I mean, as, you know, the schedule… Really, that's such a huge aspect of how a school runs." For school renewal specifically, scheduled meetings occurred monthly, with a few exceptions due to the natural breaks on Centennial's calendar. As was already shared once in this work, without actively scheduling the dedicated time for cross-divisional interactions, Joseph Allen suggested, "it just wouldn't happen."

  Shared Focus. During his interview, Zach Keller reflected on the potential of Centennial Day adding further cross-divisional meetings outside the school's current renewal structures. After some thought, he shared, "I don't know what the real functionality or practical points would be of meeting more across divisions, other than maybe just getting to know colleagues better." And he continued to add, "I think those meetings would end up being just sort of like,

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'okay, well we didn't really get much accomplished'… and, we're all, you know, super busy. So, let's not necessarily add another meeting to the agenda, you know."

From the literature, a lack of scope or focus often resulted in collaborative teams extending discussions no further than a superficial level (Handelzalts, 2019; Trabona et al., 2019); the outcome feared by Zach above. However, one of the underlying strengths of Centennial Day's renewal framework uncovered in the data is providing teachers clear expectations and outcomes for cross-divisional collaboration. By supplying teachers with a specific theme and objective, school renewal helps push Centennial's collaboration past surface-level exchanges.

The mechanisms of school renewal increase faculty's engagement with the collaborative subject matter in two ways. First, part of the agency provided during school renewal allows teachers to select their top-three areas of interest. This leadership decision immediately affords faculty and staff some level of ownership over the collaborative process. Additionally, the committee descriptions supply even more clarity to each topic's ensuing inquiry. For example, the description associated with the 2019-2020 committee, *Grading for Equity,* frames the group's focus by referencing a specific professional development workshop and states the team's efforts will be to drive "theory into practice."

Besides providing clear faculty expectations, school renewal's research and report structure grant the cross-divisional groups a concrete outcome towards which they can all work. Together, the pieces of the school renewal framework produce explicit expectations and objectives that make its collaboration more fruitful to the school. Allison Riley shared her thoughts on one of her recent school renewal experiences:

And, they're really fascinating too… the last one I was on was student leadership. So, we

got to hear about like what the student leadership looks like in the lower school, in the

middle school, and then in the high school. And then also, like, what was the Admissions

Department seeing when candidates were coming to [CDS] and like what are the

leadership things that they look for when people are, you know, trying to get into [CDS].

And so, it's fascinating.

Additionally, in contrast to his comments above, Zach easily identified the value of cross-

divisional collaboration within the clearly defined parameters of school renewal. Speaking

specifically to his recent experience collaborating around the school's schedule, Zach admitted,

the committee's work was meaningful, even if it did not lead to concrete change:

The experience of, like, I learned a lot about our schedule. And, about our different

scheduling and, different divisions, just by being on that committee…I was on this

committee last year. And, just sort of…having a better understanding of, like, you know,

why did other divisions do things the way they do it? And, you know, what things are

implicitly valued in our schedule? Did anything change from last year? No. But, I think

that people on the committee gain something from it.

Model Successful Collaboration. Teachers at Centennial Day School experience a great

deal of professional autonomy, which from the data appeared to hinder teachers' willingness to

collaborate cross-divisionally outside the formal structure of school renewal. Mary Matthews

spoke to this directly:

I think there are a couple of things that are… I don't want to say barriers, but there is

tension. I think that the climate and culture of [CDS] is that teachers are professionals and

they get to do what they want to do."

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However, as Zach Keller asserted, within the divisions, Centennial is a highly-collaborative organization. Zach described working at Centennial this way:

> So, I've described this to many people. And, what it feels like to teach at [CDS] is like the rings of a tree that, you know, you have your inner ring. And, then you have several subsequent rings that sort of cover more ground, and, I would say, being a middle school teacher, your inner ring is your grade-level. So, those colleagues are people that… this is, you know, this sounds like a cliché soundbite, but those people are very much more like family, you know… And, then I would say the, the ring outside of that is probably the division, you know… So, the middle school as a whole. And, then the ring outside that might be department, which at [CDS] is structured fifth-grade through 12th-grade. And, then the final, you know, ring is kind of the K-12, you know, campus. So, um, yeah, that's kind of it, you know, I mean, I think the ring analogy really does make sense.

From Centennial's case-data, examples of highly-successful, within-division collaborations include the teaming model in elementary and middle school, team-taught courses in high school, and vertical subject teams in elementary school. According to Allison Riley, the more teachers have experienced these in-division forms of collaboration, the more willing they have become to step across divisional lines. Allison said, "I think that we… there's been more very public examples of collaboration going well and different models of collaboration." She continued, "And that, I think… for a lot of people who are hesitant about change, they just need to see it done once…so they can ask questions. I think that's helped."

De-Center Individual Leaders. As was shared above, faculty at Centennial Day enjoy a generous amount of professional autonomy. Accordingly, leadership expect Centennial's faculty and staff to act as free-thinkers, adding intellectual capital to the school organization.

Centennial's director, Robert Alligood, summed up the school's expected level of

professionalism:

> My least favorite line is, "just tell me what to do, and I'll do it." Whenever somebody
>
> says that within earshot of me, like, well, the first thing you might want to do, is go work
>
> somewhere else. Like, I don't know. I don't know what to tell you what to do. Like it's
>
> your job. You're supposed to tell me what you need in order to be awesome.

Robert further articulated the professional culture of the school:

> You know, when people show up like… "Okay, where's the binder that tells me what to
>
> do every day?" Like we don't have it… like we don't. There's no binder. Like, "what am
>
> I supposed to do?" Like, well, talk to your colleagues, like I'm sure you'll figure it out.

Centennial's orientation on professionalism directly feeds the school's stance on innovation and

sourcing intellectual capital.

Across all formal leaders at Centennial Day, a common thread from the data is the belief

leaders should cultivate, rather than supply, innovation within the school organization. Joseph

Allen, the head of middle school, expressed the notion:

> You know… all my good ideas dried up a long time ago… all my fresh ideas… but, I've
>
> developed an ability to sort of encourage others to speak up, and you know…our
>
> [leadership's], kind of collective purpose, I think, is to follow up on the best ideas,
>
> doesn't matter who produces them.

Adding support to the idea of de-centered leadership, Robert provided a satiric quip on his role

as Centennial's director:

> So, it's like I just keep saying…don't look at me man, like you know…I can help them
>
> [teachers] make stuff happen, but it's not like I'm gonna go up on the mountain and come

down with a tablet…And I really… I really, like resist the idea of that, you know, I'm

supposed to be the leader of, like, you know, the thought leader of the school.

However, Robert continued to suggest that his role, rather than "thought leader," was to put the

mechanisms in place for others in the school to be innovative and successful. A practical

example of de-centering formal leadership at Centennial is the division heads and director

supporting personnel on school renewal committees rather than leading as chairs.

The reverse side of the de-centered leadership coin is innovation must originate from

other areas of the school community, which, as Zach Keller made clear, it does:

I probably should have said this earlier in our conversation. But I think [our director] said

this at some point… school leadership can really come from anywhere at [CDS]. I mean,

it can come from one idea from a teacher and become a major decision that the school

latches on to.

Joseph Allen bolstered Zach's perspective, also sharing, "It could be, it could be a senior faculty

member or a fifth-grader… It doesn't matter where the idea comes from."

Because leaders at Centennial work to cultivate ideas from all levels of the school

organization, it is a part of the culture to pursue even casual suggestions. Robert conveyed the

benefit of the school renewal arrangement, asserting, "it's [school renewal] an accelerant, you

know, you take an idea and, you know, it gets some run now."

De-centering individuals is one way Centennial Day energizes the school's cross-

divisional renewal efforts. A separate leadership activity that also fuels the emergence of capital

at Centennial Day School is establishing its culture as a learning organization.

Learning Organization. Cultural through lines are the shared values at Centennial Day,

providing the organization with an overall sense of collective group membership. The two most

prominent through lines represented in Centennial's case-data were *valuing diversity* and serving as a *learning organization.*

Valuing diverse peoples and perspectives is an essential aspect of Centennial Day as a school organization. Mary Matthews resolutely articulated the school's commitment to being an inclusive environment, a sentiment which was openly shared by every participant in Centennial's case group:

> We [CDS] are committed, and we don't apologize for it. We're committed to our
>
> diversity and inclusion work. We're committed to students and families feeling
>
> comfortable in this place. We're committed to building our practice around our subtle
>
> behaviors and beliefs and how they might impact another group of people or person. We
>
> have a very richly diverse community.

> The data makes it clear that Centennial's mission of diversity and inclusion shapes a

significant portion of the school's focus. Nonetheless, the data did not support the diversity through line as a leadership condition specifically promoting *the practice* of cross-divisional collaboration, especially because of the revealed inconsistencies of cross-divisional interactions outside the formal structure of school renewal. However, the case-data did indicate serving as a learning organization encourages the development of the innovative capital driving Centennial's school renewal process.

The case participants in this study described Centennial Day School as an organization fully committed to continual growth and evolution. Zach Keller said of his school:

> I have never been part of a…of an institution that is more willing to change…Or willing
>
> to like completely throw out the playbook. And because we just recognize that education

is a moving target. And, oftentimes, what we feel like the right thing to do is, is the hardest thing to do.

Leaders actively foster Centennial's climate of learning through supporting faculty and empowering their pursuit of innovation in the classroom. All three division heads articulated how powerful it is to say "yes" to teachers. Joseph Allen described it this way, "But, it's been great for me to be able to say yes when people say, you know, well, 'this is what I really want to do this year.'" A participant-specific example of innovation in action is Allison Riley's efforts to pilot Centennial's American Studies course. With the encouragement of her division head and the help of another high school colleague, Allison's American Studies course hybridized the teaching of American Literature and American History. Unfortunately, due to the resulting class-size restrictions from COVID-19, American Studies was put on hold at Centennial. As another example, at the time of this study, Lori Oliver, the elementary participant from Centennial Day, was authoring a STEAM proposal to present to school leadership. Zach Keller happily shared, "I mean, we live, you know, I live in a fantasy world in education. I mean, we get to live out any educational fantasy we want to do. And, as a teacher, you really feel supported."

In addition to broadly encouraging innovation, Centennial Day also supports what they call "small bets." As described by participants, small bets are grassroots initiatives that have the possibility of growing into something much larger for the school. Recently, a school renewal group was formed to "identify and document the small bets that led to positive change along with small bets that failed, were stalled, or discontinued." The results of this team's inquiry revealed "a vibrant culture of grassroots risk-taking and experimentation." Just a few of the successful small bets listed in the group's report were: alternative assessments, flexible seating, community partnerships, Math Lab, and mastery transcripts.

Thom Washington described the school's innovative culture sharing, "It's not necessary something be deficient. We certainly approach it with that mindset of like what could be as opposed to like, what are we doing." He continued to say, "I hope people in the community feel that it [this school] truly is kind of a K-12 school that's pushed ahead."

Cultivate Stakeholder Trust. At Centennial Day, the data revealed that cultivating relationships and building trust were central to the school's leadership activities. Thom Washington expressed, "the ability to form and sustain strong relationships with students and faculty… that's the currency of the realm at [CDS]." At all levels of the school, investing in relationships helps establish a high level of trust in the community. On her role as a leader, Mary Matthews stated, "I think my role with parents is important. It's been easy at [CDS] because, from the top, this place is about relationships. So, from the top and from kindergarten, it's about relationships."

The accrued trust Centennial enjoys with its stakeholders enhances the school's ability to be innovative and push its style of education forward. Thom explained the impact of this earned trust:

> We enjoy a good bit of trust from our parents and community members. I think we
> communicate openly, frequently, transparently with them about who we are and what we
> believe for education, and we make a lot of promises that we strive really significantly to
> deliver upon… most the time we do. And, because of that, I think we built that bank of
> trust with families. So, we can try new things. If we wreck it… we're like, "hey, like
> nothing bad happened, it just didn't work." And that's fine. So, I think that gives us a
> little bit of latitude.

In addition to providing the school more flexibility for educational experimentation, relationships and trust keyed the collaborative interactions at the administrative level. Centennial's division heads explained before Thom's arrival, collaboration was challenging. Joseph recalled, "I would say… It's… I think it's [cross-divisional sharing] more of it now. It feels, it feels different now than before, primarily because of the people involved." Mary added, "So, I think often in a K-12 school, there's… It feels like there's some resistance and competition around space and time and teachers and the resources. And, I feel like we [the division heads] play really well together."

In the above section, the leadership activities vital to establishing cross-divisional collaboration at Centennial Day School were discussed. Three central themes materialized from Centennial's case-data, mitigating barriers, de-centering individual leaders, and serving as a learning organization. Additionally, cultivating stakeholder trust was identified as a supportive activity that enhanced Centennial's capacity to be innovative and connect with colleagues. In the next section, the cross-case leadership-patterns between Centennial Day School and Davidson Prep are presented.

Cross-Case Synthesis: Leadership Practice

At both Centennial Day School and Davidson Prep, leaders play a critical role in fostering cross-divisional practice. Before discussing the crucial overlaps between the two sites, it is equally important to highlight where the schools differ. The goal of drawing attention to the schools' leadership differences is not to suggest one style is more effective than the other. Instead, by highlighting the variation, I hope to strengthen the merit of the identified thematic patterns.

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Centennial Day and Davidson Prep are vastly different schools, with drastically different missions and educational philosophies. However, keeping the focus on leadership, the primary distinction between the two sites is Davidson's leadership style is largely top-down, while Centennial's leadership is predominately bottom-up. Importantly, this fundamental contrast in leadership style does not reflect the level to which each school involves its faculty in the act of leading. Rather, it illustrates from where in the organization the vision of the school is originated. School renewal at Centennial Day is not simply a collaborative experience. At its foundation, it is a mechanism for allowing the school's strategic initiatives to rise up from within the school organization. At Davidson, the school's strategic vision is set at the highest levels and then through cross-divisional committees and initiatives, aligned and articulated down through the school. Though the leadership models at each school are constitutionally opposed, several leadership patterns exist in how the sites encouraged cross-divisional collaboration including, *addressing barriers, establishing a constructive culture,* and *investing in relationships.*

Addressing Barriers. At both Centennial Day and Davidson Prep, leaders act proactively to limit the potential obstacles of cross-divisional collaboration. Specifically, the leadership activities that materialized as patterns between the cases were providing *shared teams, shared time,* and *shared foci.*

Shared Teams. Shared teams directly relate to the formal structures Davidson Prep and Centennial Day put in place to overcome the potential limitations of proximity. Formal teams were already discussed in detail in the above *practice* section, but their importance to cross-divisional collaboration bears repeating. In the absence of formal structures, leaders at both schools shared instances of cross-divisional collaboration being "shrugged off" by faculty members. Before Davidson Prep formalized peer-observations, teachers consciously ignored the

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suggestion to go, see, and learn from other faculty members. Due to COVID restrictions, Centennial day paused its school renewal efforts, resulting in a far more "insular" school organization.

Shared Time. Time is one of the most precious commodities in school and is a crucial barrier to overcome if schools are to engage in cross-divisional collaboration. As Joseph Allen from Centennial Day shared, "…the biggest resource is, and it has nothing to do with money… it's time… we don't necessarily have all the time we need." At Davidson Prep, leadership addresses the limitation of time on two fronts, both scheduling time for teachers to meet during early dismissals and leveraging policy to encourage faculty to cover classes for one another. At Centennial Day, the primary way leaders overcome time is through scheduling. Before the start of each school year, the administrators at Centennial craft a meeting schedule to accommodate the various cross-divisional needs of the school.

Though each school approaches the barrier of time in slightly different ways, two critical patterns emerged that are worth further consideration. First, at both sites, the meeting time for cross-divisional collaboration is scheduled during regular school hours. As Davidson learned, asking teachers to come early or stay late to meet with cross-divisional colleagues led to a lack of faculty investment. Second, scheduling takes place well in advance. Cross-divisional meetings at Centennial Day and Davidson are not afterthoughts, plugged into the calendar when convenient. Both schools prioritize the practice by blocking time well before any interactions are to occur.

Shared Foci. Finally, the last pattern in how leaders at Davidson and Centennial reduce the impact of cross-divisional barriers is by providing shared foci. In practice, the route to providing teachers focal points around which to collaborate is very different at Davidson and Centennial, but both approaches meet the same end.

At Centennial Day, school renewal provides teachers with explicit expectations and outcomes for their collaborative interactions. As Zach Keller demonstrated in the data, away from the defined topics and goals of Centennial's school renewal program, faculty were not confident increased cross-divisional collaboration would yield beneficial results.

At Davidson Prep, the school-wide curriculum mapping and goal setting provide the shared foci for cross-divisional collaboration. Davidson's strategic goals, "the big goals," as Amy Martenson referred to them, seem to supply guidance for all division-level goal setting and regularly are the focus of the school's cross-divisional committees, such as the communication and technology teams. Additionally, thanks to the school's mapping efforts, according to faculty, the curriculum at Davidson truly serves as a collaborative spine. As Chris Taylor described, "So, really it's, it's the culture of the, of the school, those conversations, and the collaborative nature, but it's also the backbone is mapping. We're intentional."

Establishing a Constructive Culture. According to Bryk and Schneider's (2003) work on trust, the responsibility of establishing a collaborative culture lies with school leaders. At Davidson and Centennial, leaders take practical steps to reinforce cultural through lines and establish conditions favorable for each of their specific styles of cross-divisional collaboration.

Davidson's leaders explicitly emphasize the school's sense of "family" through school artifacts, policies, and meeting discussions. Additionally, leaders actively model relationship-building practices and take a personal interest in their faculty and staff beyond the school walls. The resulting "we" belief at Davidson encourages faculty to seek cross-divisional interactions, even outside the bounds of formalized teams. Courtney Nichols suggested of this culture, "Yeah, I mean, I'm confident enough to go talk to anybody, and the school allows that… each area is very open to somebody else."

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At Centennial Day, the school's cultural belief in serving as a learning organization bolsters its bottom-up approach to innovation and the school renewal program. As Thom Washington described, "Yeah. This school, again, is a learning organization like I have not seen in other places." Leaders reinforce this school-wide cultural belief through their active support of teacher-led initiatives and encouraging ideas to emerge from any level of the organization.

Invest in Relationships. The final leadership pattern between Centennial Day School and Davidson Prep is each school's commitment to building relationships with stakeholders, consequently *enhancing* leaders' abilities to foster cross-divisional interactions. It is essential to highlight the indirect-nature of this thematic pattern. As the data supports, relationships are not a direct way of fostering cross-divisional collaboration but serve as a mechanism for augmenting the requisite leadership activities.

At Davidson Prep, leadership's investment in relationships increases the effectiveness of several leadership activities, most notably around communication and expectations. As Courtney Nichols commented, "And also, letting people know the good, the bad, and the ugly, but making those relationships so that you can give the ugly as well."

At Centennial, investing in relationships creates a bank of trust within the community, strengthening the school's ability to experiment and be innovative. In addition to granting Centennial additional flexibility, positive relationships increase the effectiveness of the school's admin-level collaboration. Though the least tenured division head, Thom asserted, "And…I don't know, obviously, how that worked beforehand. It didn't sound like it was the greatest of relationships between the middle school and high school head." But he continued to say of the present group of division heads, "I think we do feel a strong sense of… a kind of affinity for each

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other as we lead this school. So, I think those are the things that help kind of the cross-divisional collaboration."

The cross-case synthesis revealed the key leadership patterns most responsible for encouraging cross-divisional collaboration at Davidson Prep and Centennial Day School as addressing barriers, establishing a constructive culture, and investing in relationships. In the next section, the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration at Centennial Day School and Davidson Prep are detailed.

Outcomes

In the preceding sections, I presented the findings for *how* exemplar independent schools practice cross-divisional collaboration. In previous works, researchers found participants felt cross-divisional sharing led to a greater understanding of the curriculum, increased student learning, and a greater appreciation for the work of non-grade-level colleagues (Birkhead et al., 2017; Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019). Because each of these previous studies involved public school or international educational personnel, the present work's secondary goal was to reveal the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration within the unique setting of American independent school education.

The results of this study's cross-case synthesis revealed two patterns in the perceived outcomes at each site school, *continual school improvement* and *connected community.* Before discussing these cross-case patterns, this work reports the specific outcomes recognized by the case-participants at Davidson Prep and Centennial Day.

Davidson Prep: Outcomes

Three themes emerged from the data as perceived outcomes of cross-divisional practice at Davidson Prep, *organizational growth, deeper shared identity,* and *increased job satisfaction.*

Organizational Growth. As a result of cross-divisional sharing at Davidson Prep, leaders and faculty feel the school has experienced *improved instruction*, *increased curricular alignment*, and *improved academic outcomes*.

Instructional Improvement. According to participants, Davidson's cross-divisional practice helps identify growth opportunities for faculty to serve students better. Amy Martenson explained the school's improved ability to recognize and respond to needs:

> We [the school] are able to recognize what are areas we need to grow…what scope and sequence needs to change? What practices are really working, and we want to hold firm to that, and, what is it that, just because we've always done it that way, is there, is there a more efficient way to do it? Or, can we think of that in a different way?

Emily Polli described cross-divisional sharing's impact on instruction, stating, "Um, I definitely think the teachers are becoming better teachers [because of cross-divisional collaboration], just because you are learning, learning from each other and everybody has different experiences." Emily continued to share that without the school's commitment to cross-divisional interactions, their pedagogy would stagnate, and the students would suffer. She declared, "And, I think we'd all yeah just kind of be stuck doing the same thing [if we didn't collaborate] …which is not going to help the kids."

Curriculum Alignment. The second way Davidson Prep feels cross-divisional collaboration leads to organizational improvement is through increased curricular alignment. Because Davidson's mapping initiative provides a focal point around which cross-divisional conversations can occur, faculty regularly seek out the foundations of curricular deficiencies. Chris Taylor explained this outcome in detail:

This is a real-world example again, um, and I hate to use… I hate to use math and

science, but it's just, it's what a lot of my world revolves around. But teaching unit

conversions. When I first got here, seven years ago, I was shocked that you know we had

some gaps in converting units, you know, feet to meters and so forth and so forth. And

so, what I was able to do… thanks to our curriculum mapping efforts… was to go to the

roots of where that problem is, and we as a department in science and in math were able

to address [it]…

Amy Martenson also spoke to the enhanced alignment between divisions resulting from the

mapping and collaboration efforts:

It's [the curriculum mapping] also been good because it's shown gaps in what we're

teaching. So, like if they're having trouble in subtraction, she [the elementary teacher]

can look and say, okay, K5 doesn't do a lot of subtraction, and then first-grade is

expecting it. So, then she can talk to the administrator in kindergarten, they can work on

that with their team. It's just opened up a whole line of communication for the

collaboration.

Academic Improvement. The ultimate goal of any academic initiative is to positively

impact student learning. Citing both subjective and objective measures, the faculty and staff at

Davidson Prep believe that is just what their cross-divisional collaboration is accomplishing.

David Clark, the school's director of instruction, proclaimed, "And I think we've seen the fruits

of this effort, and, I think we've grown… our academic scores have continued to increase and

move up the scale. And so, we've seen good results." Chris Taylor also referenced Davidson's

increased test scores, asserting, "we set… we broke our ACT record last year. I mean, we're just

seeing so many good things, and I think that has become contagious." Finally, Emily Polli spoke

to the academic improvement she perceives, sharing. "I think also, just like the kids are being more prepared for college, more prepared for real life, because they, I think they see the relationships that we have with other teachers."

Deeper Connection. The second outcome faculty and staff perceive as a result of the school's cross-divisional sharing is a deeper sense of connection. Specifically, interacting across divisions seems to foster new relationships and strengthen appreciation for cross-divisional peers. David Clark shared, "We have a connection with people that we never work with on a daily basis… we've learned from each other. We've come to appreciate what each division is doing." Though certainly not the only participant to describe the school's connection as "family," Amy Martenson characterized the school's bond in this way:

> And I think it [cross-divisional sharing] is wonderful because it allows our staff to know each other, because we keep growing. And we say we're a family, and I really do feel like we're family, but we've got to be careful that we're not sub-families. Like we're not the kindergarten family, we're the elementary family, and then we're the middle, and we're the high school. But, we are a family.

Providing context to Amy's cautionary statement, Cynthia Cole described what she felt would result if Davidson's cross-divisional focus ceased:

> Part of the culture of the school [would change], because also I think it would be a disconnect between our staff members from K3 to 12th-grade… Because [now] my K3 teachers feel connected right now to the 12th-grade teachers and 10th-grade teachers.

In addition to strengthening the relational connection between peers, Davidson's community expressed a belief that cross-divisional sharing helps connect faculty and staff to the

school's purpose. William Payton passionately spoke when discussing the merit of cross-divisional sharing and asserted that it was a foundational aspect of Davidson Prep:

So, if all of a sudden we decided that we're all going to be one room silos, you know, we're gonna have our own little, little red, red-brick schools… It would fundamentally change everything about the experience each student and family has at our school because it goes absolutely polar opposite of what we try to do. In fact, I mean … yeah, if you said you took that [cross-divisional connection] away, it's just fundamentally, philosophically, the opposite approach of who we are.

Increased Job Satisfaction. Davidson's case-data regularly named school improvement and connection as perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration. However, a third and somewhat unexpected theme, assertively appeared in the data as well, *increased job satisfaction.*

When directly asked what would change if Davidson Prep halted its cross-divisional focus, Annie Reese bluntly responded, "Um, I think, employment, if I'm thinking super honest, it's part of the reason we work here." She continued, "And while you might can go to the school down the road and make a little bit more money, you're not going to have that same feeling as an employee." Job satisfaction and teacher retention were described as perceived outcomes by several case participants, but Courtney Nichols spoke in direct chorus to Annie's message, declaring, "Um, probably don't plan on going anywhere else, they'll have to kick me out…So, like it is such an open, friendly, welcoming place to work. It's just got a great teacher, staff, faculty atmosphere."

At Davidson Prep, faculty and staff perceive organizational improvement, organizational connection, and job satisfaction as outcomes of the school's cross-divisional collaboration. In the

next section, the perceived results of cross-divisional sharing at Centennial Day School are presented.

Centennial Day School: Outcomes

At Centennial Day School, the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration range from the cultural to the pragmatic, including, *unifying community, evolutionary inertia,* and *easing accreditation.*

Unifying Community. Leadership and faculty at Centennial Day School believe cross-divisional collaboration creates space for relationships to develop, keeps the community informed, and establishes more mission consistency throughout the organization. According to Joseph Allen, "when people share the same space either socially or professionally, they just get to know each other a little better…that you know, creates a more enjoyable work environment." Joseph continued, "And it really, I think it contributes so positively to a school climate where people… you know, people generally like and appreciate and respect the people that they work with." Speaking specifically about school renewal, Lori Oliver, an elementary teacher, reflected on the unifying impact of the program:

> I mean, I think that it [CDS] would change dramatically [without school renewal]. I think that, that relationship piece that I was talking about is really crucial to this being a school that really serves K through 12. I mean, if we don't really work together across the divisions, then why aren't we just in separate buildings.

In addition to connecting persons, Centennial's community believes cross-divisional collaboration leads the divisions to act more synchronously in mission-specific ways. Joseph Allen provided a specific instance of the divisions acting in concert:

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This is a really specific example, but we had an issue at the start of this year, where we

had a… there was a racist word that was in a book that seventh-graders were reading.

And, the teacher, when she was reading it aloud, she would read that word every time

because it was there in print. And, it was making some students really uncomfortable.

And so, it went to parents, and then it came back to us, and we had a conversation across

divisions about it to find out what's happening. Like how is that kind of thing, addressed,

particularly in high school, where I know they read books that are, you know, would

show up on any banned book list… and how do they handle that?

Finally, without cross-divisional collaboration to unify the school community to its mission,

Thom Washington believed each student's sense of self would be most impacted:

And I think they would… The students could lose this sense of affirmation and really

kind of being known, and valued for who they are…I think that's [affirming students] a

through line at [CDS], that we think about a lot. And I think the faculty would miss out

on thinking about the connections and the bigger reasons for why we do what we do.

Evolutionary Inertia. As I previously presented in the *leadership activity* section, one of

the cultural through lines at Centennial is being a learning organization committed to pushing

education forward. Zach Keller described, "I mean, we are so, constantly revising our own

pedagogy and, like our own identity. And, I think that really is wherein lies our greatest

strength." Robert Alligood, Centennial's director, articulated the schools drive for educational

improvement:

I often say, you know, like someday, somebody's going to look back at what we're doing

and wonder why we did stuff… and like I want them to like our story. As opposed to like,

you know, everybody has a job. This is my job. I will do my job, but I'm not really, I'm

not really about like pushing education forward.

According to Thom Washington, the school's progress towards improvement was ongoing, as he

shared, "But we [the school] often feel like… everything evolves. So, we're, we're hitting that

process of evolution pretty much all the time."

In line with Centennial's commitment to educational evolution, one of the perceived

outcomes of the school's cross-divisional collaboration is a stream of innovative capital. Allison

Riley suggested, "And, I do think there's some great ideas that come from school renewal

committees. So, it's a way to kind of crowdsource research and answers to important issues

facing the school." Thom Washington added, "it [school renewal] says to the community that all

of us have a part in making sure that the school continues to grow, and learn, and reinvent itself

like we are a learning organization." In addition to Centennial's ongoing investigations into

revising its World Languages Program and grading policy, Robert Alligood, shared, "And so, we

overhauled faculty compensation that way [through school renewal], we overhaul the evaluation

that way, we did some scheduling that way, we did a bunch of DEI [diversity, equity, and

inclusion] work that way."

Eases Accreditation. The final and most practical outcome of Centennial Day's cross-

divisional collaboration is easing accreditation. According to Robert Alligood, Centennial Day

School renews its accreditation every five years, joking:

In our part of the world… we have to get re-accredited every five years…. which I don't

know… it's some sort of a verdict on how bad education is in the south or something….

like most of the rest…everywhere else I'd seen 10 years [to be re-accredited].

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However, because school renewal provides constant evaluation and reporting on the most relevant topics in the organization, when Centennial needs to renew its accreditation, it has four or five years of data from which to pull. Allison Riley described this arrangement:

> Like I think also the cynic's view is that it's [school renewal] a way to make the school accreditation process significantly easier, like… We have four or five years of like reports to draw on when we want to write-up our documentation. So, that's super helpful.

Robert added, "So, at one level, it's [school renewal] an expedient because that fifth year [of accreditation] was really easy. All you to do is just put together all the stuff you did the prior four." In fact, as a part of this research, Centennial shared its most recent re-accreditation report, which consisted of an introductory letter, a brief description of school renewal, and 14 detailed school renewal committee reports authored by the faculty and staff of the school.

The perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration at Centennial day largely stem from its school renewal program and include unifying community, evolutionary inertia, and easing accreditation. In the final section below, the results of the cross-case synthesis for perceived outcomes are outlined.

Cross-Case Synthesis: Outcomes

The cross-case synthesis of Davidson Prep and Centennial Day School revealed two patterns in the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration, *connection* and *continual school improvement.* In addition to these two central themes, a secondary pattern materialized, *outcomes supporting requisites.*

Continual School Improvement. At both Centennial Day and Davidson Prep, cross-divisional collaboration is perceived to lead to overall school improvement. At Davidson, faculty

and leadership feel cross-divisional sharing helps uncover and address educational needs in the school, and subsequently, improves instructional and academic performances.

At Centennial Day School, the perceived growth primarily results from the school renewal program. Unlike Davidson, which intentionally focuses its collaborative efforts around the curriculum and academic goals, Centennial's faculty and staff collaborate on a broad range of topics, including infrastructure, scheduling, diversity, and specific pedagogic strategies. Therefore, a critical aspect of this cross-case pattern to note, is not simply the presence of improvement, but that the areas of improvement observed by participants at Centennial and Davidson directly result from the initial foci set by leadership.

Connection. The data from both site schools provided significant support for cross-divisional collaboration leading to increased organizational connection. At Davidson and Centennial Day, faculty and staff members perceive cross-divisional practice to build relationships between cross-divisional peers and connect the schools to their missions.

At Davidson Prep, Cynthia Cole shared, "if you ask probably every staff member here individually, they will tell you that we have a family atmosphere. People say that all the time, but you'll, you'll get that a lot." Cynthia was well supported in her assessment, as every participant at Davidson Prep mentioned "family" connection as one of the perceived outcomes of their sharing. According to William Payton, "that [sense of family]… permeates through everything that happens here with the school."

At Centennial Day, school renewal is seen as a mechanism for unifying the school's three divisions. Lori Oliver shared, "I don't know if school renewal, per se, is the only way this could happen, but I tend to think that it's a great engine for [it] happening. It definitely makes it [connection] happen." And, Joseph Allen added, "one of the things that it [cross-divisional

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collaboration] allows us to have in place… is more consistency than we would otherwise have… it feels like we're a lot more consistent with our mission and with each division."

Outcomes Supporting Requisites. An interesting pattern emerging from the cross-case synthesis of Davidson and Centennial Day was outcomes supporting requisites. The two cross-case leadership patterns presented in the previous *leadership activity* section were *addressing barriers* and *establishing a constructive culture.* Furthermore, it was also illustrated that *investing in relationships* augments each schools' ability to carry out the above leadership practices. Thus, the potential exists for the resulting peer-connections reported as an outcome of Centennial and Davidson's cross-divisional practice to encourage the schools' future cross-divisional interactions. It is important to note that the relationships believed to form due to the perceived peer-connection do not promise increased sharing. The pattern in the data simply illuminates the duality of relationships as both output and contributory input.

The patterns in apparent outcomes of cross-divisional sharing between Centennial Day and Davidson Prep include continual improvement and connection. As an additional theme between the two schools, it is surmised that the peer-connection resulting from cross-divisional sharing can enhance the possibility for future cross-divisional interactions. In the section below, I offer a focused summary of this study's cross-case synthesis.

Summary of Cross-Case Themes

The research objectives of this study were to reveal how independent schools practice cross-divisional collaboration and uncover the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional interactions in independent school communities. Over the last several sections of this work, I used the results of this study's thematic analyses and cross-case synthesis to provide substantial detail around each of these research goals. The intent of this final section is to offer a succinct

and definitive summary of the critical cross-case themes that emerged from this investigation. To help guide this review, Figure 7 provides a relational overview of this study's thematic findings for leadership activity, cross-divisional practice, and perceived outcomes in independent school settings.

From this study's cross-case synthesis, three patterns emerged explaining how cross-divisional collaboration occurs in independent schools. First, to foster cross-divisional collaboration, the data indicates leadership must address the barriers of proximity, time, and scope. Establishing formal teams and providing a shared space for cross-divisional collaboration was supported as the most effective way the case-schools overcame proximity issues. The site schools addressed the limitation of time through scheduling practices and, importantly, did not ask cross-divisional teams to meet outside regular school hours. Scope refers to the breadth of content which could be discussed in cross-divisional teams. Though through very different means, both site schools provided their cross-divisional groups shared foci around which they could concentrate their interactions.

Second, the cases in this study illustrated the importance of establishing a constructive school culture to encourage cross-divisional collaboration. From the data, the specific nature of the school's culture seemed to be less critical than its alignment to the organization's collaborative aims. For example, even though the two schools in this study embodied drastically different cultures, Davidson's "we" belief enhanced the intentionality of their collaboration, and Centennial's commitment to experimentation and inquiry strengthened the strategic innovation of the school renewal program.

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Figure 7

Relational Overview of Cross-Divisional Practice in Independent School Communities:

Leadership, Practice, and Outcomes
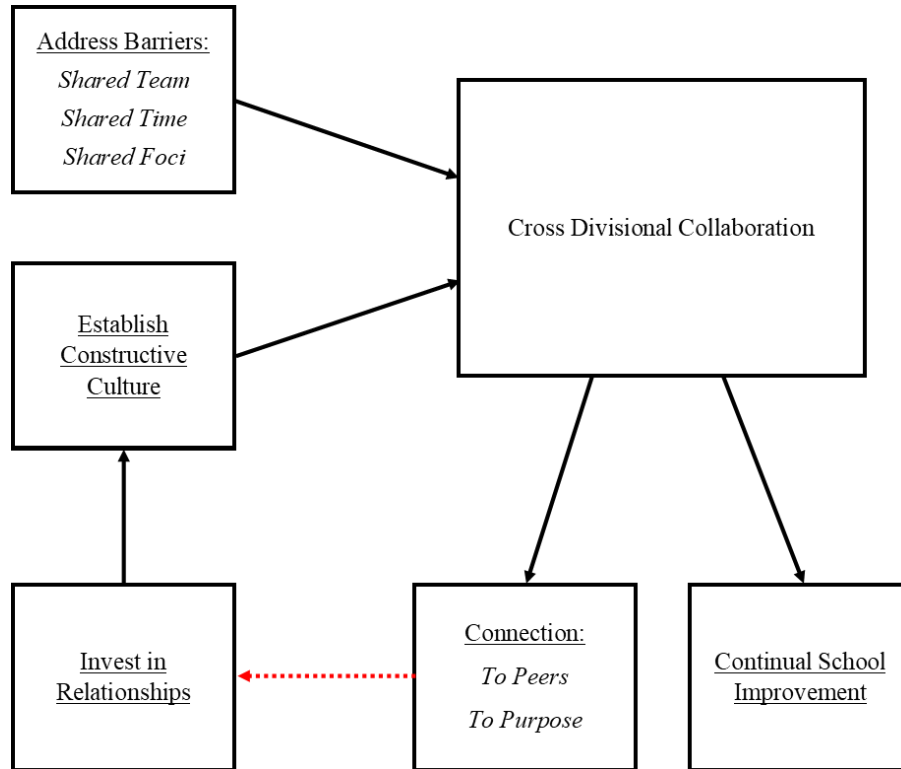
Lastly, investing in relationships was common at both sites and augmented the schools' abilities to practice cross-divisional collaboration. At Davidson, relationships were essential to reinforcing expectations and fostering open communication. At Centennial, building relationships enhanced the school's capacity to be creative and eased collaboration at the formal-leadership-level of the school.

In reference to the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration in independent schools, two central patterns developed from the cross-case synthesis. First, at both site schools, participants felt connection occurred due to their school's practice of cross-divisional collaboration. The data supported connection as an inclusive term referring to both social

relationships and alignment to the schools' purposes. As a secondary theme, the data suggested the bonds resulting from cross-divisional collaboration *could* strengthen the school's potential for future collaborative interactions.

Finally, as is the goal with any educational reform, both site schools perceived continual organizational improvement as an outcome of cross-divisional collaboration. At each site, the areas of school improvement were directed by the shared foci discussed above. For example, at Davidson, where the majority of collaboration occurs around the curriculum, the growth was perceived in the areas of instruction and academic outcomes, and at Centennial, the perceived growth mirrored the topical offerings in the school's renewal groups.

In the next section of this work, I connect this investigation's findings to the extant educational research literature and further clarify the struggles and successes Davidson and Centennial experienced during their implementation of cross-divisional collaboration. Following my discussion of the results, I offer recommendations for future cross-divisional research and recount the limitations incurred by this work.

Discussion

In the previous chapter and sections, I presented cross-divisional collaboration as a promising topic in educational research that was not yet fully understood. Specifically, because previous studies relied on unsustainable interventions to facilitate their cross-divisional teams, a gap in the literature existed around how schools could implement this unique style of vertical collaboration without external assistance (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Handelzalts, 2019; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019). To begin resolving this blind spot in the literature, this multiple-case study aimed to identify two independent schools practicing cross-divisional collaboration at a high level and investigate how these exemplar schools carried out cross-

divisional collaboration in their real-world contexts. Additionally, because none of the previous studies on cross-divisional collaboration involved K-12, independent school communities, this work's secondary ambition was to uncover the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration within this specialized sphere of American education.

The patterns emerging from this work's cross-case synthesis indicated leaders foster cross-divisional collaboration by addressing the barriers of proximity, time, and scope and establishing a constructive culture. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that participants at both site schools felt sharing across divisional lines resulted in continual school improvement and increased connection.

In the upcoming sections, I discuss and contextualize this study's cross-case findings by drawing on relevant empirical works from the educational research field. Additionally, after situating this study's results within the literature, with an eye towards informing practitioners, I provide an authentic account of each site's change process, illuminating the struggles and achievement of each school's cross-divisional implementation.

Encouraging Cross-Divisional Collaboration

Though Centennial Day School and Davidson Prep approached the activity of leadership in two very different ways, the cross-case synthesis revealed in order to encourage cross-divisional sharing, leaders at each site worked to address potential obstacles and established constructive cultures in line with the school's cross-divisional practices.

Establishing Your Constructive Culture

Though school culture represents an incredibly complex phenomenon (Bass & Avolio, 1993; Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Liou & Daly, 2014), participants announced its importance so prominently, it was impossible for this work to ignore. At Davidson Prep, the data established

the school's "we" belief as a means of lowering the symbolic divisional barriers and fostering the numerous cross-divisional exchanges in the school. Davidson's leaders explicitly invested in reinforcing the relational culture through artifacts, policy, and new employee training. In fact, during our interview, Chris Taylor got up and carried his computer across the room to show and explain one of the cultural artifacts hanging on his wall:

> So, we have those things [mission, Portrait of Graduate, Characteristics of Professional Excellence], but they're not just lost in our paperwork or on the website, they are posted in every hallway… and you're like, "well, big deal. We've got missions and crests all in the hallways." But the thing is, is they're in big bold… [Walks over and shows values on the wall]. This hangs in every classroom… I constantly reference them [the values] in the classroom. And, the same is true on the teacher level, you know… And, I'm not giving you a corny answer, like hanging things on the wall makes it [cross-divisional collaboration] you know possible. What I mean is, that's, that's one approach… they [the values] come up in meetings… they're the basis of our communication models, you know.

At Centennial Day, the school's constructive culture appeared to be reinforced more implicitly than at Davidson Prep. As evidence, one of Centennial's recent re-accreditation documents recommended the school form a committee to explicate the school's unwritten norms. Within the context of Centennial's cross-divisional collaboration, the data showed the school's cultural commitment to inquiry and experimentation encouraged the innovative capital driving the school renewal program to emerge from all levels of the organization. Zach Keller articulated this relationship in the data:

I really do feel like, you know, the work I do at [CDS] does feel very fulfilling, it feels very important…And, I think that that's a function of our culture, which is constantly asking, you know… are we, are we up with the times, are we evolving with what we think needs to change?

From the collaboration literature, researchers found establishing a trusting culture led to increased sharing in school organizations and helped facilitate change (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Liou & Daly, 2014). Though the present study certainly promotes the importance of school culture to collaborative practice, a distinction exists between this work and those expressly citing the benefits of a trusting culture.

At Davidson Prep, the defined relational culture bolstered the school's vision to act with intentionality around the curriculum and safeguard the "high-quality, Christian education [the school] worked so diligently to create." In contrast, Centennial Day encouraged a culture of inquiry and experimentation, with faculty enjoying a great deal of instructional autonomy. Though the manifestation of each school's culture differed drastically, both Davidson and Centennial's established norms encouraged their school's specific style of cross-divisional collaboration. Therefore, rather than a descriptive pattern *within* Davidson and Centennial's school cultures, the central theme supported by this work is leaders' promotion of cross-divisional collaboration through the *alignment* of organizational norms and the school's collaborative practices.

The second leadership pattern that materialized from Centennial and Davidson's data was the importance of addressing proximity, time, and scope.

Overcoming Proximity

Within school organizations, proximity is a well-researched obstacle to social interactions (Reagans, 2011; Shirrell & Spillane, 2019; Spillane et al., 2017). From the social network literature, Spillane et al. (2017) reported proximity as a significant variable explaining the presence or absence of professional relationships within school settings.

In Davidson's case-data, Annie Reese, a K4 teacher at the school, described the physical distance she needed to cover if she and her elementary colleagues were to collaborate. She explained, "It's [our kindergarten building] far from the elementary school. It is also a hike to the high school. We have to cross 100 yards [the football field]." During my lone site visit for this work, I experienced the walk from Davidson's elementary building, across the football field and track, and eventually to the kindergarten site. One-way, it took me roughly five minutes to make the trip.

To limit the potential issues created by proximity, both site schools constructed formal teams in which faculty and staff could collaborate. At Davidson, formal teams took on a variable assortment, including committees and academic departments. Though Centennial also reported a variety of formal team structures, in practice, school renewal provided the primary basis for the school's formalized collaborative groupings.

The collaborative benefits of formalized teaming revealed in the present work add additional support to Feld's (1981) focus theory which asserts relationships in an organization are most likely to materialize around shared foci. Specifically, focus theory contends that the more or less constraining a focus, the more or less likely a tie is to form between individuals. For example, belonging to the same school organization is a less constraining focus than sharing membership on a school committee or team. At both sites collaborative interactions tended to

form around smaller constraining foci, and of significance, in the absence of formal teaming and structures, both Centennial Day and Davidson Prep experienced instances of failed collaboration.

Investigations from the social network literature described a similar phenomenon. In their study of year-to-year relationships in school settings, Spillane and Shirrell (2017) found professional relationships dissolved a rate of 50 percent. However, the researchers also reported the most predictive variable of a sustained relationship was teachers' shared memberships on a formal team, such as a grade-level or committee.

Data from the present work indicated formal teaming provides faculty common group membership and helps connect cross-divisional colleagues across the physical divide of their school campuses. Nonetheless, according to examples from the literature, without time to meet, collaborative teams become nothing more than nominal in nature (Bryk et al., 1999; Sims & Penny, 2015; Stoll et al., 2006).

Overcoming Time

Time was the second barrier this investigation revealed leaders must overcome to facilitate cross-divisional collaboration. As Joseph Allen, Centennial's head of middle school, shared, scheduling cross-divisional meetings is challenging due to scheduling variances. He asserted, "It's much harder to find time cross-divisionally… our [the divisions] schedules are all different." Thom Washington succinctly added, "I think time is just challenging for everybody."

From this work's analysis, the scheduling patterns critical to Centennial and Davidson's cross-divisional practice were providing meeting time during regular school hours (i.e., not asking teachers to come early or stay late) and scheduling interactions well in advance. In line with this study's findings, the broad base of PLC research regularly identified common planning time as a requisite of the practice (Bryk et al., 1999; Sims & Penny, 2015; Stoll et al., 2006).

When scheduling is neglected or teachers' time is not valued, research demonstrates collaboration is significantly damaged.

As a cautionary tale from the PLC literature, Sims and Penny (2015) studied teachers' experiences of a failed learning community at a high school in Texas. The results of Sims and Penny's investigation revealed the school's misuse of time was one of the central catalysts for the learning community's failure. After initially providing ample time for its PLCs to meet, the school in Sims and Penny's study revoked the meeting time, but also expected teachers to continue the practice, a request that was simply not realistic. The school leadership's decision ultimately damaged teachers' practical ability to collaborate and figuratively deprioritized the school's commitment to professional sharing.

Considering both the scheduling practices revealed in the present study and the research produced by Sims and Penny (2015), scheduling appears to serve both as a pragmatic structure of collaboration and symbolically reinforces the organization's commitment to its practice.

Overcoming Scope

By their nature, cross-divisional teams have a wide-breadth of potential topics around which they could collaborate. However, the literature indicated, without a narrow scope of focus, vertical teams often descended into superficial- or generalized-exchanges (Handelzalts, 2019; Trabona et al., 2019). In congruence with these previous works, the present research showed, without a specific outcome toward which to aim, the benefits of cross-divisional collaboration were challenging for teachers to identify. As Zach Keller explained:

> But, I mean, if I'm being honest, like if let's say I were to walk on campus tomorrow and have a meeting after school with a wider variety of teachers, you know, from lower school and high school… I'm just not sure what would get accomplished. I think it would

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more or less just be checking in on each other like how's everybody doing this year?

And, how are the kids doing? And, it might be an enjoyable conversation, but, you know,

people also might just resent it for that. It's, it's… another scheduled meeting where, you

know, what did we accomplish, nothing.

In the data, Zach juxtaposed his hypothetical narrative with the collaboration he experienced

with his immediate grade-level team, "But the team model… I love… it just feels like a really

nice support system that you constantly have on your side." And he continued, "formally, I meet

with my team twice a week. But I mean, dude… It's every day… it's multiple times a

day…because it's just so, much more spur of the moment to make the ship, you know, sail."

Zach's comments illuminated an important distinction between within-division sharing

and cross-divisional collaboration. The value of the former is concretely reinforced by the

immediacy of teachers' day-to-day functions. Conversely, the pay-off of the latter, such as

increased curricular knowledge (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016, Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015), is far more

abstract and delayed.

To push cross-divisional collaboration past surface-level exchanges and to provide a

clearer outlook on its benefit, both site schools in this study provided their faculty and staff

shared foci around which collaboration could occur. At Davidson Prep, the school's curriculum

mapping and goal setting guided the majority of cross-divisional conversations, while at

Centennial, the school renewal groups focused narrowly on a wide variety of organizational

initiatives. Handelzalts (2019) supported scope and direction as vital aspects of cross-divisional

collaboration. In his study of vertical curriculum design teams, Handelzalts (2019) reported the

vertical teams perceived to have the greatest sense of direction were also more productive in

addressing the issues within their various curricula.

In the next section of this discussion, I turn the attention from the critical leadership activities discussed above, to the outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration perceived by case participants.

Perceived Outcomes

In this section, I aim to fulfill this study's second communicated goal by drawing a comparison between the perceived benefits of cross-divisional collaboration represented in this research and the outcomes described in previous empirical works. Resulting from the cross-case synthesis, participants at Centennial Day and Davidson Prep believed cross-divisional collaboration led to continual school improvement and increased connection.

Your Focus, Your Improvement

As indicated above, continual school improvement developed as a common outcome between this study's site schools. Previous research investigating the merit of cross-divisional collaboration reported the practice led faculty to a greater understanding of the curriculum and an increased ability to anticipate where students might struggle with the content (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015).

At a high level, the present study's *improvement* theme reinforces the enhanced curricular understanding described in previous research (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016, Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015). However, the former studies cited above investigated cross-divisional collaboration outside a normalized school framework, and researchers pre-set the direction of the peer-discussions. Within this study's real-world contexts, schools were free to set the focus of their collaborative efforts. As such, the perceived organizational growth reported by participants was in direct relationship to the shared foci and vision provided by school leaders.

At Davidson Prep, where the curriculum and goal setting provided the focal points of cross-divisional collaboration, the subsequent improvement was observed in academic areas of the school. In comparison, at Centennial Day School, the renewal program engaged faculty in a wide range of strategic topics. Consequently, the organizational improvement reported by Centennial's director impacted several areas of the school, including pedagogy, pay scale, teacher evaluations, scheduling, and even physical plant. Based on this data pattern, the continual improvement described by participants in this work appeared to follow an input, output relationship, where the preceding foci directly influenced the outcomes.

In addition to continual improvement, participants felt cross-divisional collaboration resulted in deeper peer- and school-connection. As David Clark, Davidson's director of instruction, declared, "we've become more appreciative of what each division does and what their role is." The increased appreciation for cross-divisional colleagues expressed in the data aligned with Ciampa and Gallagher's (2016) work, which asserted vertical collaboration across scholastic transition points led teachers to feel a greater appreciation for the work of their vertical peers.

In the present study, connection also referred to centering faculty and staff around the site schools' missions and visions. This finding is of special significance to those in the independent school community, as independent school missions are intended to guide all aspects of their function (Boerema, 2006). Speaking directly to the school's sense of mission consistency, Centennial's head of middle school shared, "So, as an opportunity… we had missed previously… we ought to probably be consistent across divisions. So, I'd say there's that piece. Benefit of consistency." At Davidson Prep, Chris Taylor asserted, without the school's cross-

divisional interactions, it would be harder to connect everyone to the overall purpose of the institution:

And, also, you know, I think that it makes it harder to uniformly apply your global mission [without cross-divisional collaboration]. And that's an opinion. I'll tell you, it's an opinion. But I just think it's hard when you don't, you know, when you've got English doing this or middle school doing this. I think it's harder to apply your mission.

In the previous sections, I contextualized this study's findings within a selection of works from the extant educational research literature. In the final sections of this discussion, I openly share participants' accounts of their school's failure, ongoing struggle, resiliency, and achievement with their practices of cross-divisional collaboration.

A Process, Not a Destination

The findings produced from this investigation present addressing barriers and establishing a constructive culture as the two activities most central to school leaders implementing and sustaining cross-divisional collaboration in independent schools. However, to put these results forward without disclosing the challenges experienced by this study's site schools would be misguided and irresponsible.

First, though leaders at both Centennial Day and Davidson Prep worked diligently to mitigate the obstacles of cross-divisional collaboration, it is essential to understand that these leadership efforts led to the alleviation, not elimination, of the perceived barriers. Participants at both sites openly noted time and proximity as active constraints on cross-divisional sharing. At Centennial Day School, Joseph Allen commented on the difficulty of time and scheduling, declaring, "It's much harder to find time cross divisionally, our [the division's] schedules are all different." Allison Riley added, "Time is always an issue. I mean, there's just not enough hours

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in the day and our schedules." At Davidson Prep, Emily Polli reported feeling isolated in her building due to the recent growth of the school:

> We just built a new middle school a few years ago, which is so, so nice and amazing. But you do feel like you're just kind of away from everybody. And so, I think, which again I don't really know how… like I feel like I have this conversation with people all the time, like "oh my gosh we never see anybody … never ever talk to anybody." I don't know how you fix that. I really, you know, I wish I knew.

At Centennial Day, teachers felt the constraint of time was amplified by the other initiatives vying for their attention. Lori Oliver, one of Centennial's first-grade teachers, explained, at Centennial, other priorities often supplanted her efforts to seek out cross-divisional colleagues:

> And when I say time. It's not just the scheduling piece… it's the time, like, can I give up this, to take on this. And it's making… it's prioritizing what… you're hoping to get out of it so that that backward design definitely comes into play when I'm thinking about whether I'm going to do a collaboration with another class or another grade. Is it going to be really productive for my students? What am I really trying to get out of it? What am I giving up?

Another challenge to cross-divisional collaboration experienced at both site schools was the resistance to and process of change. Participants reported that when Davidson first reformed its curriculum mapping process and committed to fully transparent classroom practice, it was difficult for those in the school. Of this transformational process, Chris Taylor bluntly shared, "And, then as far as what you're asking about, the process of change…for the lack of a better word. It was hell. It was…it was, it was tough." Though the process was challenging, Chris continued to attest that the change process led to a healthier school organization. He asserted,

"now our teachers as a whole have kind of fought that battle… they trust the leadership… that trust has been earned."

As I previously described, at Centennial Day School, an elemental "tension" existed between Centennial's faculty and the school's cross-divisional collaboration. Based on participants' accounts, the collaborative strain seemed to branch from the generous autonomy provided to teachers and a wide-spread belief that school renewal is not entirely action-oriented.

Autonomy and educational experimentation are a part of the educational roots of Centennial Day School. As Mary Matthews described, there are several very positive aspects to Centennial's teacher autonomy. She affirmed, "The, the plus of that [culture of autonomy] is when I hire people. I get to say, 'you know what, you get to teach here, you get to be a teacher.'" Yet, in the data, Mary also admitted Centennial's teachers do not necessarily respond to being told what to do because of the autonomy in place.

In addition to teacher autonomy, the tension around Centennial's cross-divisional practice arose from the community's perception that school renewal did not lead to immediate change. Mary Matthews described this situation in detail:

> For a teacher, it feels like working on a project, and then you have some information to share…one would expect there to be some action around the information… Let's think about how to develop the River Campus so… we get more use out of it. And, we come up with a great plan… But it's not a priority… so teachers, I think, go, "well, alright then. Why do you ask?" There's a little bit of [that].

In his interview Robert Alligood, Centennial's director, did not shy away from addressing this narrative in the community:

The other thing is people like to say in these communities, "and, nothing ever gets done."

So, what we've taken to do, doing recently, is like before we start a process, we give

people a list of things that happened because of school renewal… Because people like

really committed to this narrative. Like, I went to all these meetings, and nothing ever

happened... actually a lot of stuff did happen, not the thing that you wanted, but a bunch

of other stuff did.

Robert continued to explain, some recommendations were simply not levers the school could

pull:

Early on, I said the three things you got to be really careful of in school renewal,

something that costs a lot of money, reduces the number of school days we have, or

involves hiring more people… like if you, if your recommendations are one of those

three things, don't expect a lot of progress.

Though Centennial's case participants acknowledged the underlying tension around increased

cross-divisional sharing, when asked about school renewal's impact on the organization, every

participant offered their support for its benefit.

Above, I shared the experienced and even still present obstacles of cross-divisional

collaboration at Davidson Prep and Centennial Day School. The purpose of highlighting the

struggles at each site is not to discourage schools from cross-divisional collaboration. Rather, in

illustrating the shortcomings of these two exemplar sites, I hope to authentically represent the

effort necessary to implement and sustain cross-divisional collaboration, a challenging journey,

which according to participants, is well worth the wait.

Well Worth the Wait

The most tenured leaders at Centennial Day and Davidson Prep described the change

process leading up to the schools' current cross-divisional practices as a slow evolution towards

a highly-collaborative culture. Joseph Allen, who served as head of middle school for over 20 years at Centennial Day, explained the school's gradual shift:

> You know, I'm thinking back over 20 years… you know, my memory is not what it used to be… So, I'm, you know, you can't remember a lot of the details, but I do think that it's [the school's collaborative culture] been kind of a, like a slow shift, that along with it has come this kind of, you know, more collaborative spirit.

According to Cynthia Cole, Davidson's collaborative culture experienced steady growth over her 24-year tenure. William Payton added that some of Davidson's stakeholders had no idea how long the school worked to get where it was:

> There's people here that have no idea. You know, they have no idea what all had taken place before they got here… to get it to the place that they wanted to join. Right now, it's a place that people are seeking to be a part of, be it parents, students, or teachers. It didn't happen overnight.

Ultimately, the formal and informal leaders at both Centennial and Davidson expressed a fervent belief in the significance of cross-divisional collaboration, believing the resulting connection and organizational growth were well worth the invested effort.

At Centennial Day, Robert Alligood earnestly shared, "it's really hard to get a K-12 school, even a K-12 school on one campus… it's really hard to get them [faculty] to talk about stuff that's not right in front of them." And he continued, "Yeah. Me, I've spent what little capital I have on the idea that we all work in the same place together. And that it's [this school] going to be what we make it [as a community]." Thom Washington further emphasized the significance of Centennial's collaboration, stating it truly connected the faculty and staff in their pursuit of the school's educational mission:

For many, many of us, it's about creating and developing a lowercase "D," democratic

citizens, who understand how they interact with the world, and their place in the world,

and their commitment to a broader society. And, if we did our own thing, I don't think we

would ever intentionally get there.

With a great deal of sincerity and passion in his voice, William Payton detailed

Davidson's growth towards cross-divisional collaboration:

We [the school] didn't have those conversations of, "Hey, it's going to take me 6.7 years

to get to this point," and, "oh, by the way, there are going to be blood, sweat, and tears

along the way." No, we just, we thought this was the right thing to do…I don't… think

we ever… realized the challenges that we were going to face.

Amy Martenson asserted the school's cross-divisional efforts all related to the students and

ensuring the school was doing all it could for their growth and development:

And we want to continue to do that [cross-divisional collaboration] because we can grow

our students, and we're here for them, not us. So, I think we would be super disconnected

with what is going on outside of our island, and I think students would suffer.

Finally, from the faculty perspective, Chris Taylor emphatically added, the significance of

Davidson's cross-divisional collaboration was not in any singular outcome, but in the unification

of the community in the long-term pursuit of *continued* learning:

If you don't continue to have that common thread between you and collaborate, it's easy

to lose the reins and lose control of what makes you, you…We [the school] have to do a

good job and continue to do an even better job of being a community of educators, and

being a community of learners.

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In the preceding section, I presented the results of this study within the body of educational research literature and offered an authentic account of the challenges and achievement involved with each site's implementation and continued practice of cross-divisional collaboration. In the final sections of this work, the implications and limitations of this research are detailed, along with a discussion of the potential directions for future research.

Implications

Utilizing a multiple-case study design (Yin, 2018), the present work sought to investigate *how* exemplar independent schools implement and sustain cross-divisional sharing, as well as reveal the outcomes perceived by participants. Using a cross-case synthesis to draw out the critical patterns between this study's two site schools, the results of this work make several contributions to the body of knowledge for both researchers and practitioners. First, the qualitative data from previous research on vertical forms of collaboration highlighted cross-divisional collaboration's potential benefits (Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019). However, the design of these studies relied on outside experts and funding to initiate and sustain collaboration between vertical peers. These limitations left it largely unexplained how educational leaders could implement cross-divisional sharing at their specific site schools. By intentionally investigating cross-divisional collaborative practice within its real-world context, this study's findings begin to add clarity to the previous gap in the literature. Specifically, this work revealed addressing barriers, establishing a constructive culture, and investing in relationships as leadership activities essential to implementing meaningful cross-divisional collaboration.

Second, as independent schools lean into a new era of education with amplified market competition, it is increasingly important that their faculties are strong and the entire organization

understands what makes their school standout (NAIS, 2015, 2017). Independent schools are each guided by their particular mission (Boerema, 2006) and are free to set their own curricula (Baker et al., 2016; Schuermann & McGovern, 2016). As the results of this study indicated, cross-divisional collaboration in independent schools is perceived to connect faculty and staff to their school's purpose and vision and lead to continual organizational growth. Therefore, by deprivatizing the practices of the two highly-collaborative schools in this investigation, this study provides a knowledge-base for independent school organizations to use as guidance. Of note, the direction provided by these findings is not intended to replicate the character of the schools in this research, but rather, shed light on a strategy which can truly help all independent schools discover what makes their faculty, curriculum, and community wonderfully unique.

Finally, though this research focused exclusively on independent school programs, roughly 50 million students are enrolled in public schools in the United States, compared to only 6 million students in K-12 private schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Therefore, as will be discussed in more detail later, it is critical that future cross-divisional research explores how schools in the public sector can implement and, most importantly, maintain this special form of vertical sharing. For this reason, informing future researchers, especially those wishing to apply these findings to the considerably larger field of public education, potentially represents the most significant contribution of this work.

Limitations

The present research was constrained by concerns of time, scale, and circumstance. The selected design and scope of this project limited the findings in three ways. First, this investigation of cross-divisional collaboration focused exclusively on positive performing independent schools. This design decision, by nature, narrowed the cross-case synthesis to

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schools experiencing relative success with their collaborative initiatives. Next, this study concentrated on independent schools alone. Thus, the themes emergent from this investigation do not directly translate to public schools due to the governance and structural differences between the private and public education arenas. Third, previous research demonstrated that cross-divisional collaboration could improve instructional strategies and student learning across an entire curriculum. Ideally, a longitudinal design would be applied, over multiple school years, to capture the cumulative effects of vertical sharing perceived in school organizations. The present research was limited by the time constraints of a traditional dissertation study and therefore, relied on "snapshots" from participants to glean the overall benefits of cross-divisional practice in independent schools.

Finally, in addition to the limitations imposed by this study's design, this research project fell victim to the limiting circumstances of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Ideally, the multiple-case study carried out for this work would have taken place entirely in-person at each participating site school. However, out of sincere concern for the health and safety of the participants, and guided by the recommendations of Georgia State University and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a significant portion of this study took place across virtual platforms. Though COVID-19 forced a significant adjustment to this study's setting and, consequently, limited the collection of field notes, it did not deter the spirit or rigor applied to this research.

Understanding this investigation's significance and its limitations, the following section offers suggestions for future research on cross-divisional collaboration.

Future Research

In this penultimate section, I offer several suggestions for future research to extend the findings presented in this study. In the recommendations which follow, I focus on studies that

would further elucidate the practice of cross-divisional collaboration within its real-world context and push cross-divisional research towards the substantially larger field of public education.

First, to meet this study's communicated goals, I chose to investigate cross-divisional collaboration solely within positive performing independent school communities located in the southeastern United States. This research decision allowed for the cross-case synthesis of two high performing institutions. However, independent school practitioners would benefit from greater knowledge centered on cross-divisional collaboration's potential points of failure. Thus, I recommend future studies identify independent schools with failed cross-divisional collaboration initiatives and investigate the catalysts of failure from both the leadership and teacher perspectives. Additionally, this study focused on SAIS member schools, which experience re-accreditation and strategic renewal every five years. As a way to build-off the results of this work, a study involving non-SAIS independent schools, especially organizations following a 10-year re-accreditation cycle, provides an interesting opportunity for replication.

Second, this study was limited by the time constraints of a traditional dissertation study and was further hindered by the contact-restrictions of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Due to these limitations, I relied on participants' accounts to provide insight into cross-divisional collaboration's practice in independent school communities. Based on the perceived outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration reported in both the present study and previous works, a longitudinal study focused on tracking the perceived impact of cross-divisional collaboration over several years would add greater clarity to the field of knowledge. Additionally, in this study's outcomes section it was speculated that the relationships resulting from cross-divisional collaboration could enhance the potential for future cross-divisional interactions. A longitudinal

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study centered on this particular phenomenon would potentially benefit both researchers and practitioners.

Finally, as was indicated above, based on governance and structural differences, the findings from this investigation do not directly translate to the broader field of public education. However, this study's results offer future researchers a knowledge base to study cross-divisional collaboration in a public school context. Specifically, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (2019), in the United States, approximately 6,200 public schools support multiple divisions on a single-campus site. Therefore, as a way to begin understanding how the practice of cross-divisional collaboration can occur in public institutions without external interventions, I suggest researchers aim to carry out case study research in these multi-division public schools. These unique public school sites provide an ideal entry point to extend the present work and investigate the means of cross-divisional collaboration in public school settings.

In the next and final section of this work, I offer a summary of this investigation and my concluding remarks for this study.

Conclusion

The literature overwhelmingly supports collaboration as a way to improve teacher practice and positively impact academic outcomes in schools (Frank et al., 2011; Goddard et al., 2007; Parise & Spillane, 2010; Ronfeldt et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2017; Supovitz et al., 2003; Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Recently, a small, yet promising body of research declared the potential benefits of cross-divisional collaboration, a unique form of vertical teaming connecting teachers across divisional lines to discuss teaching and learning from a broader perspective (Ciampa & Gallagher, 2016; Handelzalts, 2019; Suh & Seshaiyer, 2015; Trabona et al., 2019).

However, because of the limitations imposed by scheduling and site structures, the previous cross-divisional collaboration research left it largely unexplained how schools could implement this style of sharing without external assistance. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the means and outcomes of cross-divisional collaboration in its real-world context and explicate the leadership activities encouraging its sustained practice in schools.

As flexible, multi-division sites, independent schools offered this research a favorable arena to examine cross-divisional collaboration. Utilizing criterion-based sampling methods and the professional expertise of the Southern Association of Independent Schools, I identified Davidson Prep and Centennial Day as ideal schools for participation in this work. Guided by Yin (2018), I carried out a multiple-case study involving formal and informal leader participants at Centennial Day and Davidson Prep. To answer *how* the identified exemplar schools implemented and sustained cross-divisional collaboration, I conducted interviews, collected documents, and to a lesser extent, kept field notes of direct observations. The results of each site's thematic analysis and the subsequent cross-case synthesis strongly supported *addressing barriers, establishing a constructive culture,* and *investing in relationships* as requisite leadership activities for the practice of cross-divisional collaboration.

For researchers, the findings of the present study begin to resolve the previous gap in the existing collaboration literature, and for independent school practitioners, the results provide leaders guidance for leveraging cross-divisional collaboration in their unique, mission-specific schools. Though this study adds clarity for independent school leaders, the findings from this work may not align with public school practice because of the structural and governance differences between private and public institutions. Thus, to maximize the potential benefits of

cross-divisional collaboration on the overall field of K-12 education, investigating cross-divisional sharing in public school settings represents a crucial next step for researchers.

Through this investigation, the formal and informal leaders at Davidson Prep and Centennial Day provided invaluable insights into how schools can implement and maintain cross-divisional collaboration. Importantly, though both schools were recognized as exemplars in the independent school community, each school experienced failures and setbacks in their pursuit of cross-divisional sharing. As Centennial's director shared previously, "it's really hard to get a K-12 school…to talk about stuff that's not right in front of them." Ultimately, however, the faculty and staff at Davidson Prep and Centennial Day strongly believed their collaborative efforts led to meaningful change and created a more profound sense of connection between colleagues. As William Payton resoundingly declared, cross-divisional collaboration led to more tremendous success than he or his school ever imagined:

> I don't think we knew at the time [when we invested in this change] the challenges that we were going to face, how long it was going to take, and honestly… I don't think we knew how wonderful it was going to be once we got there… Honestly.

<div style="text-align: center;">**References**</div>

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Collaboration Survey: School Leader Form
* Required

ELECTRONIC CONSENT
Please read the following item

1. The purpose of this research study is to investigate the practice of vertical collaboration within independent schools. This project is being conducted as a part of a dissertation project through Georgia State University. This survey is being used as a part of this project's sampling procedures and your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all. If you chose to participate, you may skip any survey question. You may also decide to end the survey after you have begun. Your survey results will not be shared with anyone outside the project's principal investigator and student principal investigator. CLICKING ON THE "AGREE" BUTTON INDICATES: you have read this information and agree to participate in this survey. If you disagree, please choose "disagree" and you will not be asked to proceed any further. If you have any questions regarding this survey or this research study please contact Dr. Gregory Middleton, the study's Principal Investigator at: 404-447-0109; gmiddleton1@gsu.edu. *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ AGREE

    ◯ DISAGREE

Background

2. Please type the full name of your school in the space below. *

    _____

3. Please indicate your current role. *

Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Head of School
- ⬭ Division Head or Principal
- ⬭ Assistant Principal
- ⬭ Other: _____

4. How many years have you been in your current role? *

Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ 1
- ⬭ 2
- ⬭ 3
- ⬭ 4
- ⬭ 5 or more

General Collaboration

> This study defines collaboration as sharing between faculty and staff with the purpose of positively impacting classroom practice. The following items involve collaborative practice according to this definition.

5. Based on the definition of collaboration shared above, when faculty and staff in your school collaborate, to what EXTENT do you feel issues of academic improvement are discussed?

Mark only one oval.

- ⬭ Not at All
- ⬭ A Little
- ⬭ In Some Depth
- ⬭ In Substantial Depth

6. Based on the definition of collaboration shared above, HOW HELPFUL to instruction do you feel your school finds collaboration?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Not at all helpful

◯ A little helpful

◯ Helpful

◯ Very Helpful

Cross-Divisional Collaboration	This study defines cross-divisional collaboration as formal or informal sharing between teachers or staff of differing grade-level divisions with the purpose of improving curricular alignment and classroom instruction. For example, collaboration between middle school and elementary school math teachers to improve the scope and sequence of the math curriculum.

7. Based on the definition of cross-divisional collaboration shared above, in your school, when faculty collaborate with colleagues from other divisions (either formally or informally) to what EXTENT do you feel issues of CURRICULAR COORDINATION are discussed?

Mark only one oval.

◯ Not at All

◯ A Little

◯ In Some Depth

◯ In Substantial Depth

8. Based on the definition of cross-divisional collaboration shared above, in your school, when faculty collaborate with colleagues from other divisions (either formally or informally) to what EXTENT do you feel issues of INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT are discussed?

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Not at All
   ◯ A Little
   ◯ In Some Depth
   ◯ In Substantial Depth

9. Based on the definition of cross-divisional collaboration shared above, HOW HELPFUL to CURRICULAR COORDINATION do you feel your school finds cross-divisional collaboration?

   Mark only one oval.

   ◯ Not at all helpful
   ◯ A little helpful
   ◯ Helpful
   ◯ Very Helpful

10. Based on the definition of cross-divisional collaboration shared above, HOW HELPFUL to INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT do you feel your school finds cross-divisional collaboration?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Not at all helpful
    ◯ A little helpful
    ◯ Helpful
    ◯ Very Helpful

Collaboration Survey: Faculty Form
* Required

ELECTRONIC CONSENT
Please read the following item

1. The purpose of this research study is to investigate the practice of vertical
    collaboration within independent schools. This project is being conducted as a part
    of a dissertation project through Georgia State University. This survey is being used
    as a part of this project's sampling procedures and your participation is voluntary.
    You may decide not to participate at all. If you chose to participate, you may skip
    any survey question. You may also decide to end the survey after you have begun.
    Your survey results will not be shared with anyone outside the project's principal
    investigator and student principal investigator. CLICKING ON THE "AGREE" BUTTON
    INDICATES: you have read this information and agree to participate in this survey. If
    you disagree, please choose "disagree" and you will not be asked to proceed any
    further. If you have any questions regarding this survey or this research study please
    contact Dr. Gregory Middleton, the study's Principal Investigator at: 404-447-0109;
    gmiddleton1@gsu.edu. *

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ AGREE

    ◯ DISAGREE

Background

2. Please type the full name of your school in the space below. *

    _____

3. Please select the grade or grades in which you provide instruction from the list below. PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY. *

Check all that apply.

- [ ] Pre-K or below
- [ ] Kindergarten
- [ ] 1
- [ ] 2
- [ ] 3
- [ ] 4
- [ ] 5
- [ ] 6
- [ ] 7
- [ ] 8
- [ ] 9
- [ ] 10
- [ ] 11
- [ ] 12

General Collaboration

This study defines collaboration as sharing between faculty and staff with the purpose of positively impacting classroom practice. The following items involve collaborative practice according to this definition.

4. Based on the definition of collaboration shared above, when you collaborate with other faculty in your school, to what EXTENT do you feel issues of academic improvement are discussed?

Mark only one oval.

- ( ) Not at All
- ( ) A Little
- ( ) In Some Depth
- ( ) In Substantial Depth

5. Based on the definition of collaboration shared above, HOW HELPFUL do you find collaboration for instructional improvement?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Not at all helpful

    ◯ A little helpful

    ◯ Helpful

    ◯ Very Helpful

Cross-Divisional Collaboration	This study defines cross-divisional collaboration as formal or informal sharing between teachers or staff of differing grade-level divisions with the purpose of improving curricular alignment and classroom instruction. For example, collaboration between middle school and elementary school math teachers to improve the scope and sequence of the math curriculum.

6. Based on the definition of cross-divisional collaboration shared above, when you meet with colleagues from another division (either formally or informally) to what EXTENT do you feel issues of CURRICULAR COORDINATION are discussed?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Not at All

    ◯ A Little

    ◯ In Some Depth

    ◯ In Substantial Depth

7. Based on the definition of cross-divisional collaboration shared above, when you meet with colleagues from another division (either formally or informally) to what EXTENT do you feel issues of INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT are discussed?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Not at All

    ◯ A Little

    ◯ In Some Depth

    ◯ In Substantial Depth

8. Based on the definition of cross-divisional collaboration shared above, HOW HELPFUL do you find cross-divisional collaboration for CURRICULAR COORDINATION?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Not at all helpful

    ◯ A little helpful

    ◯ Helpful

    ◯ Very Helpful

9. Based on the definition of cross-divisional collaboration shared above, HOW HELPFUL do you find cross-divisional collaboration for INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT?

    Mark only one oval.

    ◯ Not at all helpful

    ◯ A little helpful

    ◯ Helpful

    ◯ Very Helpful

Cross-Divisional Collaboration: Formal Leader Protocol

Interview Protocol

Research Institutions:

Georgia State University

Interviewee:

Name: _____

Title: _____

School: _____

Interviewer:

WADE A. HANSE

Interview Section Used:

_____ A: Leadership Background and Philosophy

_____ B: Collaboration Implementation and Practice

_____ C: Follow-up Conversation

Other Topics

Additional Topics Discussed: _____

Leadership and Collaboration Interviews

Introductory Protocol

Today's interview will be recorded using two digital audio recorders. Additionally, hand notes will be taken during the interview. These will be used to help guide the conversation in the most stimulating direction. Only the researchers directly involved with this project will handle the notes or audio recordings. If you still agree to participate, in accordance with human subjects research, please sign the release form granting permission to continue.

Thank you for your voluntary participation in this study. This interview is scheduled to last no longer than one hour. Please remember you can skip any questions you do not want to answer, and you have the right to terminate this interview at any time.

Introduction

You have been selected to take part in this interview today because of your school's involvement with cross-divisional collaboration. This project is interested in gaining valuable leadership perspectives about the implementation and regular practice of cross-divisional collaboration within independent schools. As a formal leader in your school, your prospective is incredibly valuable to this study.

A. Leadership Background and Philosophy (Suggested Time: 15 minutes)

Before we address the specifics of collaboration in your school, I would like to spend about 15 minutes discussing your background and ideas around school leadership.

1) How long have you been in your current position?

   Possible probes:

   a) _____, years. Have you served as a school leader at other schools, or only at _____?

2) In your opinion, what are the most important aspects of your role as a formal leader in the school?

   a1) You mentioned (VISION or CULTURE), why do you feel as though that specific activity is one of the most important?

   a2) In your answer you did not mention (VISION or CULTURE), where would you rate these activities? And, how do you address them?

   b) How do you ensure others clearly understand your VISION for _____ (your area of the school)?

3) As a leader, do you look to identify teacher leaders in your organization? If so, what specific attributes or actions are you looking for in these individuals?

   Possible probes:

   a) Do you have any formal means to develop teacher leaders in the school, or do they emerge more organically?

   b) How do you leverage your teacher leaders in the school?

B. Collaboration Implementation and Practice (Suggested Time: 30-40 minutes)

I appreciate your insight about leadership. At this point, I would like to shift our conversation to collaboration.

1) So, the main focus of this study is cross-divisional collaboration which involves colleagues from differing divisions discussing the overall curriculum and instruction.

From your perspective how does sharing and planning between cross-divisional colleagues (say between elementary and middle school teachers) differ from more traditional forms like grade-level planning?

Possible probes:

a) You mentioned _____, can you expand on that perceived difference?

b) In your opinion is one from of sharing any more important than another?

2) Your school has been identified as an exemplar of cross-divisional alignment in the independent school community.

How does cross-divisional collaboration occur? What does it look like?

Possible probes:

a) How frequently does this occur? Do you feel like this is appropriate?

b) During the implementation phase, you mentioned sharing occurred _____, why has it evolved?

3) To the best of your knowledge, can you explain why your school chose to take on cross-divisional collaboration?

Possible probes:

a) So was the catalyst from within or outside your organization?

4) In your time at _____ (school) do you feel cross-divisional sharing has increased? And, if yes, to the best of your knowledge, can you explain why

Possible probes:

a) You mentioned (CULTURE, PROGRAM, ETC.), why do you feel that has been so important?

Now that we have talked about some of the structures and activities related to cross-divisional collaboration, I'd like to discuss some of the potential challenges of the practice.

5) From your experience with cross-divisional collaboration, what are some of its challenges?
Possible probes:
a) You mentioned (TIME, SCOPE/DEPTH, TEACHER BYE-IN), how have you, or others in your school worked to address that particle issue?
b) From your perspective, do you feel your efforts have been successful?

Ok, I have one final question I would like to ask.

6) What does your school get out of cross-divisional sharing? Maybe stated another way, if you deprioritized this practice tomorrow, what is going to change about your school?

Possible probes:

a) _____ (answer) can you expand on that?

7) Is there anything else you feel is important to share?

Thank you for your time today. This conversation has been extremely valuable. I will let you know if I feel like a follow-up conversation is necessary after talking with the other participants. Thanks again.

C. Follow-Up Conversation (Suggested Time: 15-30 minutes)

Thank you again for giving me some more of your time.

(Interview items discussed will be marked with an X)

_____ 1) During our last discussion you spoke to, _____ (specific response from previous interview). Now that I have had quite some time to think and reflect over that reply, can you talk more about _____ (mention specific part of response)? Because it is so important, I want to make sure I understand exactly what you mean.

_____2) In some of the other interviews the participants mentioned _____ (response), which we did not get to discuss in our first conversation. Can you speak to that from your perspective?

<center>**Appendix D**</center>

Cross-Divisional Collaboration: Informal Leader Protocol

Interview Protocol

Research Institutions:

> *Georgia State University*

Interviewee:

> *Name: _____*

> *Title: _____*

> *School: _____*

Interviewer:

> *WADE A. HANSE*

Interview Section Used:

_____ A: Educational Background and Philosophy

_____ B: Collaboration Implementation and Practice

_____ C: Follow-up Conversation

Other Topics

Additional Topics Discussed: _____

Leadership and Collaboration Interviews

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Thank you for your voluntary participation in this study. This interview is scheduled to last no longer than one hour. Please remember you can skip any questions you do not want to answer, and you have the right to terminate this interview at any time.

Introduction

You have been selected to take part in this interview today because of your school's involvement with cross-divisional collaboration. This project is interested in gaining valuable leadership perspectives about the implementation and regular practice of cross-divisional collaboration within independent schools. As a formal leader in your school, your prospective is incredibly valuable to this study.

A. Educational Background and Philosophy (Suggested Time: 10-15 minutes)

Before we address the specifics of collaboration in your school, let's talk about your specific background as an educator and your thoughts on educational leadership.

1) How long have you been in your current position?

   (***IMPORTANT, ask all probes to increase comfort level***)

   b) _____, years. Have you taught at other schools, or only at
       _____?

2) From your perspective, what makes someone a high-quality leader in education?

3) In your opinion, what are the most important actions of leaders in your school?

   Possible probes:

   a) Why these specific actions?

4) As a part of this work, your school identified you as a teacher leader. What specific actions do you feel make you a leader in the school?

   Possible probes:

   a) You mentioned _____ (several possible actions), why do you feel as though that specific activity is most important?

   b) Do others within the school help you in these areas? Can you explain?

B. Collaboration Implementation and Practice (Suggested Time: 30-40 minutes)

OK, we are going to shift our discussion to focus more on the activity of collaboration in your school.

1) So, the main focus of this study is cross-divisional collaboration which involves colleagues from differing divisions discussing the overall curriculum and instruction.

From your perspective how does sharing and planning between cross-divisional colleagues (say between elementary and middle school teachers) differ from more traditional forms like grade-level planning?

Possible probes:

c) You mentioned _____, can you expand on that perceived difference?

d) In your opinion is one from of sharing any more important than another?

2) Can you describe in detail, what the process of cross-divisional collaboration looks like at your school? How does it occur?

In education we know that teachers have incredibly rigorous schedules and are asked to take on quite a bit. Next, I would like to talk about what you feel are the most challenging aspects of cross-divisional collaboration.

3) So, from your experience with cross-divisional collaboration, what are some of its challenges?
Possible probes:

a) You mentioned (TIME, SCOPE/DEPTH, TEACHER BYE-IN), how

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has your school organization helped support its faculty in that area?

  b) Do you think it has been successful?

4) In your time at _____ (school) do you feel cross-divisional sharing has increased? And, if so why?

  b) You mentioned (CULTURE, PROGRAM, ETC.), why do you feel that has been so important?

Alright. I have one final, but important question to ask you about cross-divisional sharing here at _____ (school).

5) What does your school get out of cross-divisional sharing? Maybe stated another way, if next school year it stopped, what would you expect to change about your school?

  Possible probes:

  a) Who do you think would be impacted by this change?

6) Is there anything else you feel is important to share?

Thank you for your time today. This conversation has been extremely valuable. I will let you know if I feel like a follow-up conversation is necessary after talking with the other participants. Thanks again.

C. Follow-Up Conversation (Suggested Time: 15-30 minutes)

Thank you again for giving me some more of your time.

(Interview items discussed will be marked with an X)

_____ 1) During our last discussion you spoke to, _____ (specific response from previous interview). Now that I have had quite some time to think and reflect over that reply, can you talk more about _____ (mention specific part of response)? Because it is so important, I want to make sure I understand exactly what you mean.

_____2) In some of the other interviews the participants mentioned _____ (response), which we did not get to discuss in our first conversation. Can you speak to that from your perspective?