A Cross Cultural, Comparative Analysis of Teamwork to Embrace Diversity in Schools

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Abstract

Increasing diversity in schools today is prompting schools around the world to find effective means of addressing this diversity. Effective collaboration among educational professionals (teachers and other service providers) as a team is one key variable in effectively meeting the demands posed by diversity in classrooms. Responses (n = 210) from special education and general education professionals in Spain and the United States to a survey, were analyzed to study how teachers and service providers in different schools from the two countries perceived team functioning. The study also compared team make-up and team functioning in schools in the two countries. The respondents expressed a need for continuous within-teams review of the goals ensuring parental input and parental satisfaction enabling the team to evaluate their success in achieving the goals set initially. Respondents from both countries did not perceive family input and involvement as being valued relative to their teaming. This paper discusses results, implications, and directions for schools, educators, and future research.

Key words: Teaming, teamwork, teacher education, diversity

Introduction

Schools around the world today are in the process of education reforms. School reforms driven by a demand to serve a diverse population of students is prompting schools to find
effective means of embracing student diversity and providing quality education. Literature examining school reforms and sustainability of school reforms has identified team approach to planning service delivery as one of the most effective means of meeting diverse learning needs. As such, teamwork is increasingly becoming a vital part of the school environment. Nellis (2012) contended that teams are critically important for the operation of schools today. According to Sparks (2013), schools rise and fall based on their teamwork. Teamwork is especially prevalent in planning and implementation of special education services to meet diverse needs because of culture, language, race, religion, gender, socio economic status, gifts and talents, and disability. Since the services needed to meet these diverse needs involve general educators, related service providers, agencies outside of the school arena, and parents, there is little doubt that effective collaboration is required for these services to be successful.

Various studies (Kew, 2009; Knackendoffel, 2007; Schnorr & Davern, 2005; Spencer, 2009) have explored significance and power of collaboration and teaming that resulted in strong student achievement. Schnorr and Davern (2005) described how successful collaboration between special and general educators resulted in creating exemplary literacy classrooms. Kew (2009) studied the strength of teaming, especially in middle schools, which resulted in better student achievement; the author also cited research that indicates that middle level teachers have been successful working together to serve adolescents' unique educational needs. Critical importance of teaming at middle school level has also been emphasized by Hansen (2009) and Rottier (1996, 2000) who offered several suggestions towards ensuring continued availability of teaming in middle schools, given their importance and impact on success of students at middle school level. Knackendoffel posited that “team approaches have long been a valued part of special service professions and have become increasingly popular structures for addressing highly diverse issues in schools” (2007, p. 1).

The growth in teamwork is not surprising in special education and elsewhere given that collaboration has become more and more of a norm worldwide (Villa, 2007). Teamwork is acknowledged to be one of the most important facilitators for achieving positive and cost effective outcomes in organizations and businesses (Carver & Stickley, 2012). It also has been cited as leading to greater adaptability, productivity, and creativity than any single person can achieve (Salas, Sims, & Burke, 2005; West, Brodbeck, & Richter, 2004).
Interdisciplinary teaming is a solution to instructing heterogeneous groups of students in schools (Gable & Manning, 1999; Hansen, 2009). An interdisciplinary team, according to the authors, usually consists of three to five teachers representing various content areas. In addition, one or more building-level specialists may serve on the team as well (e.g., the learning disabilities teacher or speech therapist). Commenting in particular on the importance of teaming at middle school level, the authors cited teacher assistance teams and peer collaboration as critical for teachers when faced with difficult classroom situations of educating a diverse student body. According to Hansen (2009), developing interdisciplinary teams that function properly should be the goal of every school leader promoting school reform. Echoing similar thoughts in another study, Ogletree, Bull, Drew, and Lunnen (2001) described the importance of team-based service delivery as a common method for families and related professionals to make decisions about children with diverse needs and discussed different models. Team-based service delivery in schools also results in teachers experiencing greater parental involvement, improved work climate, and increased job satisfaction (Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall as cited in Hansen, 2009). Knackendoffel, Robinson, Deshler, and Schumaker (as cited in Knackendoffel, 2007) described the “goal of collaborative teaming that embodies the concept of working together, is to improve services to students whose needs are not met when professionals work alone” (p. 1). Dodda (as cited in Rottier, 2000) however, expressed concern that although teaching teams are enhancing school and classroom life, too many have remained paralyzed by limited vision of what teaming can and should be, due to a lack of empirical studies that report how teams in schools serving diverse populations function or the decision-making procedure teams follow. Senior and Swailes (2007) focused on understanding how and why teams perform at their best. With this information, teams can identify ways to improve their functioning. Given the number of teams involved in the planning and delivery of education, an understanding of how to improve team functioning is of critical importance.

Review of Literature

In spite of a considerable amount of research on the need for collaboration and collaboration models, there is no single unifying theory that integrates the diverse literature on
the subject or establishes an agreed on set of effective team process variables (Salas & Fiore, 2004). Consistent with these beliefs, Senior and Swailes (2007) contended that inputs (i.e., size and diversity of teams, training, etc.) and output variables (i.e., achievement of team goals) are much more straightforward than the identification of process variables.

Fortunately, in spite of the challenges and lack of unanimity, the literature does provide some insight into which team process variables are most important for team effectiveness in special education. An effort to study team process variables was undertaken by Nijhuis et al., (2007). The focus of their study was on organizations in the Netherlands providing health care and rehabilitation for children with disabilities. Nijhuis et al. identified five key team process variables. They were communication, decision-making, goal setting, organization, and team process. The authors proposed parent involvement as a sixth feature of team collaboration. Obviously, with the key role that parents play on special education teams in the United States and elsewhere, this addition is not unexpected.

Another earlier study by Fleming and Monda-Amaya (2001) also focused on the process variables critical for team effectiveness. Their focus was similar to the more recent study by Nijhuis et al. (2007). Fleming and Monda-Amaya also utilized a study methodology similar to the more recent Nijhuis et al. study. Both studies used a combination of research reviews and an expert panel.

Fleming and Monda-Amaya (2001) identified six team process variables linked to team effectiveness. The first was team communication. This included effective communication and conflict resolution skills. The second factor involved team member roles and team membership and included defining and understanding roles, team leadership, and team member responsibilities. The third area identified was team outcomes. This did not relate to the effectiveness of interventions or change in service recipient attitudes or behaviors. Instead, team outcomes for Fleming and Monda-Amaya involved the extent to which service plans were developed and revised as needed and what level of support team members had toward implementing developed plans. A fourth factor identified was team logistics. This variable related to team schedules, paperwork activities, progress evaluations, and procedures. A fifth factor identified was team cohesion. That is, the support, trust, and closeness that team members experienced. The final factor identified related to team goals. Specifically, the focus here is on
the establishment of team goals and teams monitoring and reviewing their performance relative to the achievement of goals. When asked to prioritize these six team process variables, the expert panel clearly favored three of them. They were team outcomes, team goals, and team cohesion. Interestingly, these three variables are similar to the later study’s findings by Nijhuis et al. (2007).

**Conceptual Framework**

Unlike the use of an expert panel in the two previously mentioned studies, this study focused on the perceptions of practitioners (i.e. school professionals). That is, to determine their views on which of the six factors are of most critical importance to their school teams’ functioning and success. The other unique feature of this study was its cross-cultural comparative focus. The responses of school professionals in the United States and Spain were compared to see what cross-cultural differences exist in team functioning and how these relate to team effectiveness. The reasons for the differences that are identified were explored, as well as implications for improving current teamwork practices in both countries.

This study also attempted to assess the relationship between teachers’ ranking of the various meeting process variables and demographic factors, such as the level of the school program (e.g. elementary school), teacher age, and number of years of experience as a teacher. Team outcomes were also assessed to the extent that they varied based on the ratings of the other team process variables. Finally, the school professionals’ view of parents’ contribution toward selected team process variables was assessed as well as cross-cultural differences between Spanish and US school professionals in this area.

The questionnaire used in this study was based on the work of Fleming and Monda-Amaya (2001). This approach was taken for a number of reasons. First, there is good research support for the six team-process variables identified by Fleming and Monda-Amaya. A second reason for the use of the questionnaire developed by Fleming and Monda-Amaya related to its nature and scope. It is comprehensive and, as a result, more possible factors and indicators of effective teamwork could be delineated. Finally, the clear goal of the Fleming and Monda-
Amaya study was to provide help to schools in establishing, monitoring, and evaluating their teams, and this is consistent with the focus of the current study. A brief summary of research related to each variable follows:

**Team member roles and team responsibilities.** Various studies (Nijhuis et al., 2007; Rottier, 2000; Xyrichis & Ream, 2007) found that clear team member roles lead to increased team effectiveness. Rottier contended that too often, team member roles are not identified and as such, much of a team’s work falls to the team leader. Effective leadership was identified by other studies as important for team effectiveness (Campany, Dubinsky, Druskat, Mangino, & Flynn, 2007; Hansen, 2009; Kew, 2009; Knackendoffel, 2007; Nijhuis et al., 2007; Rottier 2000; Schnorr & Davern, 2005).

**Team outcomes.** The research conducted by Nijhuis et al. (2007) supported the inclusion of team outcomes on the list of key team process variables. They suggested the importance of team member commitment to client service plans and the importance of modifying plans as needed. Citing influence of individual team member’s behavior on team outcomes as an important variable affecting team outcomes, Rottier (2000) suggested that principals should also look for consistency in how members manage classroom problems and instruction. This is due to a possibility that school principal’s presence at team meetings may unduly influence members’ behavior.

**Team logistics.** Nijhuis et al. (2007) stressed the importance of teams evaluating their performance for team success. Similarly, Campany et al. (2007) stressed the importance of measuring and recognizing team focused behavior. Finally, Xyrichis and Ream (2007) indicated, that shared decision-making is also an important team procedure to follow. Kew (2009) also emphasized the importance of dividing duties among team members so that more cooperation and collaboration can be achieved to meet students’ needs, and stated that in the middle school, interdisciplinary teams usually meet daily for at least one period.
Team cohesion. There is considerable research support for this factor and its relationship to team effectiveness. Nijhuis et al. (2007) reported the need for mutual respect among team members. Mutual support and mutual trust are also touted in the literature with regard to team functioning (Campany et al., 2007; Knackendoffel, 2007; Schnorr & Davern, 2005; Xyrichis & Ream, 2007). Schnorr and Davern (2005) described successful teams as the “teams that operate from a shared knowledge of effective practices, shared principles and beliefs, and a shared understanding of the fundamentals of teaming” (p. 495).

Team goals. There are a number of studies indicating the importance for teams setting clear common goals, agreeing on goals, and prioritizing them as needed (Campany et al., 2007; Gabel & Manning, 1999; Knackendoffel, 2007; Nijhuis et al., 2007; Rottier, 2000; Senior & Swailes, 2007; Xyrichis & Ream, 2007). Rottier (2000) noted that without exception team goals/clear objectives were the most important features of successful teams. In an earlier study in 1996, Rottier suggested that teams should adopt one or two challenging, measurable goals that become their focal point for a semester or a school year.

Team communication. Research has identified a number of aspects of communication critical for team effectiveness. These include conflict resolution, information sharing, using language and terms that are familiar to all team members, problem-solving, good listening skills, and open communication (Campany et al., 2007; Gable & Manning, 1999; Kew, 2009; Knackendoffel, 2007; Nijhuis et al., 2007; Schnorr & Davern, 2005; Rottier, 2000; Seibold & Kang, 2008; Senior & Swailes, 2007; Xyrichis & Ream, 2007). According to Rottier the nature of communication that occurs while handling difference of opinion has a significant effect on the team’s performance.

Sparks (2013) included all six of the above variables in his framework for effective school teamwork. For roles and responsibilities, the author contended that the roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined, although they can be shared responsibilities. The author’s emphasis on observable meeting processes clearly relates to logistics. Team cohesion is reflected in team members’ appreciation of each other’s skills and experiences. Lastly, Sparks (2013) identified team communication as a key characteristic of effective teams. The author
advocated for respectful dialogue and encouragement of differing viewpoints among team members.

Methods

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:
1. Did participating school teachers in Spain and the United States differ in their indication of which process variables: team goals, team roles and responsibilities, team communication, team cohesion, team logistics, and team outcome, are the most critical determinants of effective team process?
2. How did the importance participating school teachers placed on the process variables, as indicated by their ranking, differ as a function of (a) school setting (kindergarten, elementary, middle school, or high school) in which they work, (b) their age, (c) teaching experience, and (d) country?
3. To what extent were parents' family input viewed as important and sought in three key process variables (team goals, team cohesion, and team outcomes) according to the participating schoolteachers?

Participants

Two hundred and ten (N = 210) teachers and other service providers (music therapists, physical therapists, social workers, psychologists) completed a face-to-face survey. Researchers visited participating schools on the days their scheduled monthly faculty meetings were held. Visits were pre-arranged and the last 20-25 minutes of the meeting were set aside for administration of the survey. The researchers explained purpose, consent forms, and the survey and left the room when the participants indicated they did not have any questions. The voluntary nature of the survey was explained and participants were instructed not to mention their names anywhere on the survey. A box was left for them to drop their responses. Responses were collected after participants left the room. Procedure followed in the university classroom was
similar. The surveys were given out during the last half hour of participants’ scheduled class
time.

Participants from Spain included teachers from kindergarten, elementary school, middle
school, high school, and students from one university. Participants from the United States did
not include kindergarten teachers, but only teachers from elementary school, middle school, high
school, and students from one university. The university students who participated included
practicing general education and special education teachers returning to the university or
graduate credits and additional certification in general and special education.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument used in this study had two main sections. The first section of the
survey collected participants’ demographic data that included age, gender, setting they worked
in, years of work experience, job position, names of teams they had worked on, and number of
people on the teams in which they worked. The survey responses were anonymous as no names
of participants and/or schools were requested anywhere in the survey.

The second section of the survey instrument used in this study was based on Fleming and
Monda-Amaya (2001) who identified and validated a list of critical process variables
(statements) for effective teaming in schools. Fleming and Monda-Amaya (2001) ranked the
variables under six categories: team goals, team roles and team membership, team
communication, team cohesion, team logistics, and team outcomes. The survey used in this
study had a total of 35 statements (see Table 1) in a 6-point Likert scale. Participants had to
indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately
disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = agree slightly, 5 = agree moderately, and 6 = agree strongly)
with the statements as it related to their experience working on team(s). The category of team
goals had eight statements, team roles and team communication each had five statements, team
cohesion had eight statements, team logistics two, and team outcomes had seven statements.
Space was provided at the end of each category for the participants to write their comments or
suggestions. Maximum score under each category (6 x the number of statements under each
category) indicated a stronger (score of 48) commitment of teams towards team goals, stronger
team membership (score of 30) among the team members, better communication (score of 30)
between the team members, better team cohesion (score of 48), better team logistics (score of 12), and better team outcome (score of 42) with respect to the team(s) on which the teachers worked. The last question asked participants to rank the six critical process variable categories in order of importance to them as being critical for effective teaming and teamwork.

Procedure

The first step involved completing protocol of obtaining permission from the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) to carry out the research with the potential participants. The first author conducted a pilot study with 20 graduate students returning for their Master of Arts degree in special education or general education and who were also practicing teachers in public schools. A reliability analysis of the scale yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha of .96 (n=20) demonstrating a strong internal consistency of the questionnaire statements. The final instrument did not require any revisions based on the results of the pilot study. Participants from the pilot study were not included in the final sample. The survey was translated in Spanish by the second author, who then administered it in Spain after completing the necessary protocol. The pilot study with the translated instrument involving 31 practicing elementary and secondary teachers in Spain, also yielded a strong inter-item reliability Alpha of .92 (n= 31).

Principals of various schools in the United States and Spain were contacted to seek their permission to conduct the survey with their faculty. In the United States, schools that participated included one high school, one middle school, and one elementary school, and 25 other practicing teachers in a university course who returned for their graduate studies (n =114). This number did not include 20 teachers enrolled in another graduate course who participated in the pilot study. Schools that participated in Spain included kindergarten, secondary/ high schools, one middle school, and one elementary school (n =96), excluding the teachers who participated in the pilot study. The surveys were administered in a face-to-face format during the first 15-20 minutes of the monthly staff meetings in participating schools. Surveys were also administered in university classrooms. The university students who participated included practicing general education and special education teachers returning for graduate credits and
additional certification in general and special education. Information letters given to all participants indicated that participation in the survey was voluntary, and returning the surveys indicated their willingness to participate in this study. Descriptive statistics summarized the demographic data. Statistical procedures used to analyze the responses to answer research questions included chi-square tests, t-tests, and F-tests.

**Results**

The survey procedure in both countries yielded a total of 210 (N=210) valid responses. Reliability analysis repeated with the final study samples in Spain and the United States resulted in a reliability of .97 (n=71) for the Spanish sample, .98 (n=110) for the United States sample and .98 (N = 210) for the merged file demonstrating a strong reliability for the study’s questionnaire.

Descriptive statistics summarized the demographics of the participants. There were a total of 210 teachers; 96 from Spain and 114 from the United States. These participants included 38 special education teachers, 118 general education teachers and 60 others working in different areas and included music therapists, physical education teachers, physical therapists, bilingual specialists, speech therapists, and psychologists. There were more female respondents (156) than male (54) and two respondents left this field blank. The reported age of participants ranged between 23 years and 60 years, with their reported years of experience in schools ranging from 1 year to 39 years. Participants had worked on various teams, and although not a stipulated requirement for participation, had worked with at least two other professionals; some having worked with 10 to 16 different professionals having worked on a variety of teams. Some specific teams mentioned included: child study teams, pre-referral teams, grade level teams, curriculum teams (math, science, geography, English, Spanish, etc), diversity support teams, teacher assistance teams, teacher staff teams, pastoral teams, behavior teams, internal rules committees, tutorial teacher teams, library teams, school pedagogic coordination committees, and individual education program (IEP) teams.

We wanted to assess how responding teachers and other service providers in schools from the two countries ranked the six categories of variables in terms of their importance for
team effectiveness, based on their experience working on various teams. Table 2 shows results of a frequency count to see how teachers in the two countries ranked the process variable categories. Study respondents from Spain and the United States ranked team communication as number 1 and team goals as number 2 in terms of their importance for teaming. Team cohesion ranked third for respondents from Spain whereas team outcome ranked third for the responding teachers from the United States as most important in overall success of teaming.

Results of analysis of merged data also supported the individual ranking of the variable categories by respondents from the two countries. Overall, as seen in Table 3, the ranking of variables when the data were combined indicated team communication and team goals as the first and the second choices for critical process variable categories that were perceived as most important for team effectiveness, based on the respondents’ experience working on various teams. These two choices were followed by team outcome, team cohesion, team logistics, and team members’ roles and responsibilities as their third, fourth, fifth, and sixth choices as important to team effectiveness.

With respect to the category team communication—the category ranked as the most important for team effectiveness—more respondents seemed to either agree strongly that decisions made had to be for the good of the student (49.5%) and there should be equal opportunities to speak (41.4%). There was strong and moderate agreement on six statements within this category: Decisions are made for the good of the student, decisions are alterable, team members have adequate listening time, team members have equal opportunities to speak, and decisions are reached by consensus. Demographics studied did not significantly impact any of these items individually or collectively. Most respondents felt that ‘team communication’ ranked as their first choice was an integral part based on their teaming experience.

For category of team goals, which ranked second in terms of importance, more respondents (55.5%, N = 210) agreed strongly on the first statement that the team purpose was clear with reference to the teams on which they were working. However, responses on all other process variables under this category ranged from a moderate agreement to complete disagreement. This is an important finding with implications for overall team effectiveness. Moderate agreement on other process variables and analysis of comments made indicates, although the purpose of the team to start with is clear, a sustained effort needs to be made in
terms of a continuous review of the goals that need to be prioritized, so that they are supported by family as well leading to better outcomes and success.

*Team outcome* was ranked third by responding teachers \((N = 210)\). All seven statements under this category saw more moderate agreement (ranging from 26.6% to 45.7%) indicating the responding teachers were not very positive when asked if they thought the teams they worked on had positive outcomes. A very moderate satisfaction on this corroborates analysis of the two variables under ‘team cohesion’, as well as supports the nature of their responses on items under ‘team goals’. Respondents expressed dissatisfaction in terms of lack of review and evaluation of outcomes by team members and considering parent satisfaction in evaluating the outcomes.

The fourth category, *team cohesion*, had the most respondents \((N = 208)\) either agree strongly or agree moderately indicating good cohesive teams in both countries, except for the item seeking input regarding parents where more respondents disagreed or agreed only slightly that parents felt empowered (see Figure 3). More respondents felt the teams had a unified goal (36.1 % agreed strongly) and teams had respect for one another (48.1% had strong agreement) as it related to their teaming experience. Based on the individual responses and analysis of the comments, respondents in both countries generally felt there was respect, trust, and sharing among team members.

With respect to team logistics, a mere (34.3% and 33.8%, \(N = 208\)) agreed moderately that ‘team progress was evaluated internally’ and ‘team procedures were clearly understood’, the two items included under this category. Although this ranked fifth and sixth in terms of overall ranking, the quantitative analysis, and analysis of the comments made by respondents, supports findings in previous studies of the importance of team members evaluating their success. In this study, the respondents’ comments also suggested that the team leaders should explain the procedures clearly.

With respect to *team members’ roles and membership*’ a good majority (76% and 77%, \(N = 208\)) of respondents felt strongly that the members were committed to the team process. This indicates that the team members were committed to the roles assigned to them at the beginning and understood what they needed to do individually.

The second question attempted to assess possible effects of country of origin of the respondents, type of settings the respondents worked in, their gender, age and teaching
experience on reported total team outcome, reported team communication, team cohesion, team goals, and team membership as it related to the participating school teachers’ team involvement.

There were more female respondents (156) than male (54). However, gender and the country of origin (Spain and the United States) had no significant effect on reported responses under team goals, team roles and responsibilities, team communication, team cohesion, team logistics, and team outcomes as determined by t-tests. Other variables such as age, years of teaching experience, experience as teachers or other service providers, as also the types of settings—kindergarten, elementary school, middle school, and high school—had no significant effect on overall reported team goals, team roles and responsibilities, team communication, team cohesion, team logistics, and team outcomes as it related to their teaming experience.

Family/parent involvement was assessed in three of the six variable categories: team goals (Team goals are supported by the family), team outcomes (Parent satisfaction is part of the evaluation), and team cohesion (Members, especially parents, feel equally empowered). This was the focus of the third research question. It was interesting to note that teachers in both countries responded in a very similar manner, and almost 50% of the respondents did not perceive family input and involvement as being valued relative to their teaming. Very few agreed strongly that family was considered important in the teaming process.

Discussion

Implications

On a positive note, ‘team communication’, which was ranked as the top variable by respondents in both countries, seemed to be related to the participating school professionals’ involvement in stated teams. Since communication is critical for success in any discipline that involves teamwork, this is indeed a very encouraging finding. With strong perceived communication among the team members, leaders could use this strength to improve teamwork in the other three variables that were ranked the second and the third places. These variables, team goals, team outcome, and team logistics showed more disagreement (moderate to strong) on the items.
Based on an analysis of responses, it was clear that respondents perceived teams to be comprised of committed members. Also, it appeared the teams started with a good and clear purpose in mind with open channels of communication, trust, and respect for one another. Leadership was described to be generally supportive of team members. What emerged as an implication for school and team leaders is a need for continued and sustained effort to improve the on-going functioning of school teams. The respondents expressed a need for continuous within-teams review of the goals ensuring parental input and parental satisfaction, enabling the team to evaluate their success in achieving the goals set initially. Sparks (2013) identified team communication as a key characteristic of effective teams. He advocated for respectful dialogue and encouragement of differing viewpoints among team members.

Although only three items were included pertaining to family and parent input and involvement, all three items did not generate very positive responses. Studies by Catsambis (2001), Knopf and Swick (2008), Lasky and Karge (2011), and Nancy (2000) have described various ways and steps that can be taken to promote parent/family involvement in schools. Some strategies suggested by Lasky and Karge (2011) include having parent liaisons/advisors and getting them to visit homes. Some other suggested ways to enhance parent involvement were to have parent coordinators, have some parents as translators and interpreters for others on teams, and offering ESL (English as Second Language) classes for parents. Young, Austin, and Growe (2013) specifically researched this underdeveloped area of research, i.e. intersection of parental involvement and leadership. The authors studied various possible roles parents can play and suggested that administrators/leaders devise a definition, with the help of all stakeholders including teachers, parents and community leaders, and then convey the definition to the parents.

For addressing student diversity in classrooms, our recommendations also are based on Gable and Manning’s study in 1999. To effectively meet diverse needs of students through stronger, more efficient teams, the study suggested a problem-solving approach involving a 10-step process. The 10 steps suggested included introductions of all attending members by team leader, assigning specific roles, delineating specific procedures to follow, discussion of the issue/needs of students at hand, reaching consensus, discussion of possible solutions, discussion of possible instructional accommodations, discussion of procedures for implementing the plan, discussion of follow-up plan to ensure fidelity implementation, and finally, leader’s evaluation of
participants’ success in problem solving. Since time is a scarce and expensive commodity, the authors suggested a maximum time of 20-25 minutes for this part of the meeting.

Our findings have implications for team leaders/leadership and administrators to help teachers meet diverse needs of their students with an open communication. Respondents from both countries chose team goals as their second choice. The majority of respondents only moderately agreed to various statements under this process variable. This indicated that when goals were being decided, for example to meet diverse needs, the team members lacked enough information and direction to pursue goals and sustained effort needed to be made in terms of a continuous review of the goals; goals need to be prioritized so that they are supported by family as well, leading to better outcomes and success. This is noteworthy as there was a strong agreement with only one statement under this variable category, which suggested the purpose was clear but the team was not actually working towards purpose due to lack information and a direction.

Irrespective of the nature and varied foci of different teams in schools today, we suggest the following steps for effective team functioning: (1) team membership is decided with clearly articulated goals; (2) goals are prioritised with input from all members including parents/family; (3) leaders draw out a detailed plan (as suggested by respondents) for implementation; (4) ongoing input from all team members including family/parents if they are part of the team is sought; and (5) effectiveness of the implemented plan, and team functioning and success in attaining the goals is monitored and evaluated.

Given the number of teams involved in the planning and delivery of educational services, it is critically important to take necessary steps to improve team functioning. Some recommendations offered in research reviewed (Catsambis, 2001; Hansen, 2009; Knopf & Swick, 2008; Lasky & Karge 2011; Nancy, 2000; Rottier, 2000) could be incorporated in schools. For example, administrators could ensure a continuous within-team review of the goals ensuring parental input and parental satisfaction, enabling the team to evaluate their success in achieving the goals set initially. Schools could have designated parent liaisons/advisors who could make home visits. To facilitate better communication between schools and parents, schools could seek help from some parents as translators and interpreters.
Administrators can monitor teams’ progress towards planned outcomes and have each team turn in a written summary of the week’s activity, and provide regular and immediate feedback (Rottier, 2000). Timely and continuous guidance by school leaders was also the highlight in Hansen (2009) who stated that “individual team members should not be left on their own to sink or swim with the teaming concept” (p. 33).

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

For the present study, the respondents and responses belonged to several different teams in schools. A narrower focus listing few teams, and giving a choice to respondents to limit their answers with respect to these specific teams that they chose to address, would have perhaps generated more useful and specific information. This information could then be used more effectively. Another possibility would be to conduct a qualitative study with direct and focused observations, and some focus group interviews with teachers from individual schools to study just one or two teams, such as Teacher Assistance Teams, Intervention Teams, or IEP teams. This may inform practice in schools to support current educational practices moving towards more diversity.

A qualitative study and focus groups may also lead to better study of educational settings. One of the questions to pose during the focus groups could specifically relate to the nature of support provided by the schools/school leaders to enhance interdisciplinary team effectiveness. There were differences in ranking of the variables by teachers between the two countries. Future studies could also study possible reasons for this difference in rankings by teachers in different settings through a qualitative study and focus groups. Given the importance of family/parent involvement for academic achievement, it may be worth developing a separate category for ‘parent involvement’ with related process variables.

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References


Association.


Table 1
Variable categories and individual items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Team Goals</th>
<th>2. Team Roles and Membership</th>
<th>3. Team Communication</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Purpose of the team is clear</td>
<td>2.1. Team members are committed to the team process</td>
<td>3.1. Decisions are made for the good of the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Team goals are regularly reviewed</td>
<td>2.2 The team has a leader</td>
<td>3.2. Decisions are alterable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. Team goals are understood by all members</td>
<td>2.3 Members are accountable to the team</td>
<td>3.3. Team members have adequate listening time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4. Team goals are established by team members</td>
<td>2.4 Team roles are clearly understood</td>
<td>3.4. Team members have equal opportunities to speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5. Team goals are clearly stated</td>
<td>2.5 Team roles are perceived by members as being important</td>
<td>3.5. Decisions are reached by consensus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6. Team goals are supported by the family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7. Team goals are attainable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8. Team goals are prioritized</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 210.*
### Table 1 (Continued)
**Variable categories and individual items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Team Cohesion</th>
<th>5. Team Logistics</th>
<th>6. Team Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1. Members feel safe sharing ideas</td>
<td>5.1. Progress is evaluated internally, by members</td>
<td>6.1. Team makes modifications to the plan as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2. The team has trust among members</td>
<td>5.2. Team procedures are clearly understood</td>
<td>6.2. Members are clear about their responsibilities for the plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3. Members (especially parents) feel equally empowered</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.3. Members are committed to implementing the plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4. The team has a unified goal</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.4. Team reviews the impact of the plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5. Members have respect for one another</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6. The team has support from superiors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7. The team has autonomy for decision making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8. The team has a healthy regard for disagreement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N= 210.*
Table 2

Critical variable categories for team effectiveness ranked by respondents from Spain and the United States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Spain (n= 96) % of Respondents</th>
<th>United States (n= 114) % of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Team Communication</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Team Goals</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Team Cohesion</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Team Outcomes</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Team Logistics</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Membership</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3

Ranking of critical variable categories for team effectiveness using combined data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>% Respondents Choosing</th>
<th>Mean For Total in Category Mean</th>
<th>Number of Items in category</th>
<th>Maximum Possible Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Team Communication</td>
<td>49.0%</td>
<td>24.55</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Team Goals</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>36.11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Team Outcome</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>31.42</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Team Cohesion</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>37.46</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Team Logistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Member Roles &amp;</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 210.*