



IBB

Institut für Bildungsmanagement  
und Bildungsökonomie



Pädagogische Hochschule  
Zentralschweiz · Zug

Frederik Ahlgrimm  
Stephan G. Huber

# Analysing teachers' collaboration in schools

EARLI Amsterdam, 27th August, 2009

# Content

## **Background: Why does teacher collaboration matter?**

Research questions

Study design

Results: - quantitative  
          - qualitative

Concluding remarks

Discussion

## Background:

### Why does teacher collaboration matter?

Teacher collaboration and cohesion are features of effective schools (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997; Sammons, 1999)

Teacher collaboration is said to lead to

- substantial improvement in student achievement, behavior, and attitude
- breaks the isolation of the classroom and brings career rewards and daily satisfactions, avoids end-of-year burn-out and stimulates enthusiasm
- makes complex tasks more manageable, stimulates new ideas, and promotes coherence in a school's curriculum and instruction (Inger, 1993).

## Background:

### Why does teacher collaboration matter?

*But:*

The relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement is rather weak and likely indirect (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

There is few evidence suggesting which collaborative instructional practices lead to improved student learning (Evans-Stout, 1998).

At least in Germany, teacher collaboration is still rather uncommon.

# Content

Background: Why does teacher collaboration matter?

## **Research questions**

Study design

Results: - quantitative  
          - qualitative

Concluding remarks

Discussion

## Research questions

To what extent do teachers collaborate?

Which units of teacher collaboration are perceived as particularly helpful?

Which changes result from intensified teacher collaboration in schools?

How can teacher collaboration be enhanced?

# Content

Background: Why does teacher collaboration matter?

Research questions

## **Study design**

Results: - quantitative

- qualitative

Concluding remarks

Discussion

## Study design

Part of the project “Schools in change processes and the role of school leadership” (with S. G. Huber, J. Inthorn, I. Lussi, J. K. Woike)

Exploration

Mixed-method approach: questionnaires plus group interviews

Schools as units of investigation

Sample: 15 public schools in one German town, selected on the base of a most diverse approach (still under the same legal and financial conditions): Grundschulen, Hauptschulen, Realschulen, Gymnasien

Teachers' perspective

## Study design

### Questionnaires:

The staffs of 15 public schools were polled between October 2006 and June 2007.

519 questionnaires were answered by teachers, principals and further pedagogical personnel, corresponding to an average response rate of 88%.

Amongst other, the level of school-wide collaboration, work satisfaction, time spent for collaboration were measured

Mainly descriptive analyses were conducted, as the small number of cases limits other statistical approaches

→ comparison of the schools is made possible on a quantitative base

## Study design

### Interviews:

Group interviews with leadership teams were conducted in 14 of the 15 schools between November 2007 and June 2008; thus, 41 people were interviewed overall

semi-structured interviews

approximately 60 minutes per interview

Qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2007; Steigleder, 2008)

# Content

Background: Why does teacher collaboration matter?

Research questions

Study design

**Results - quantitative**

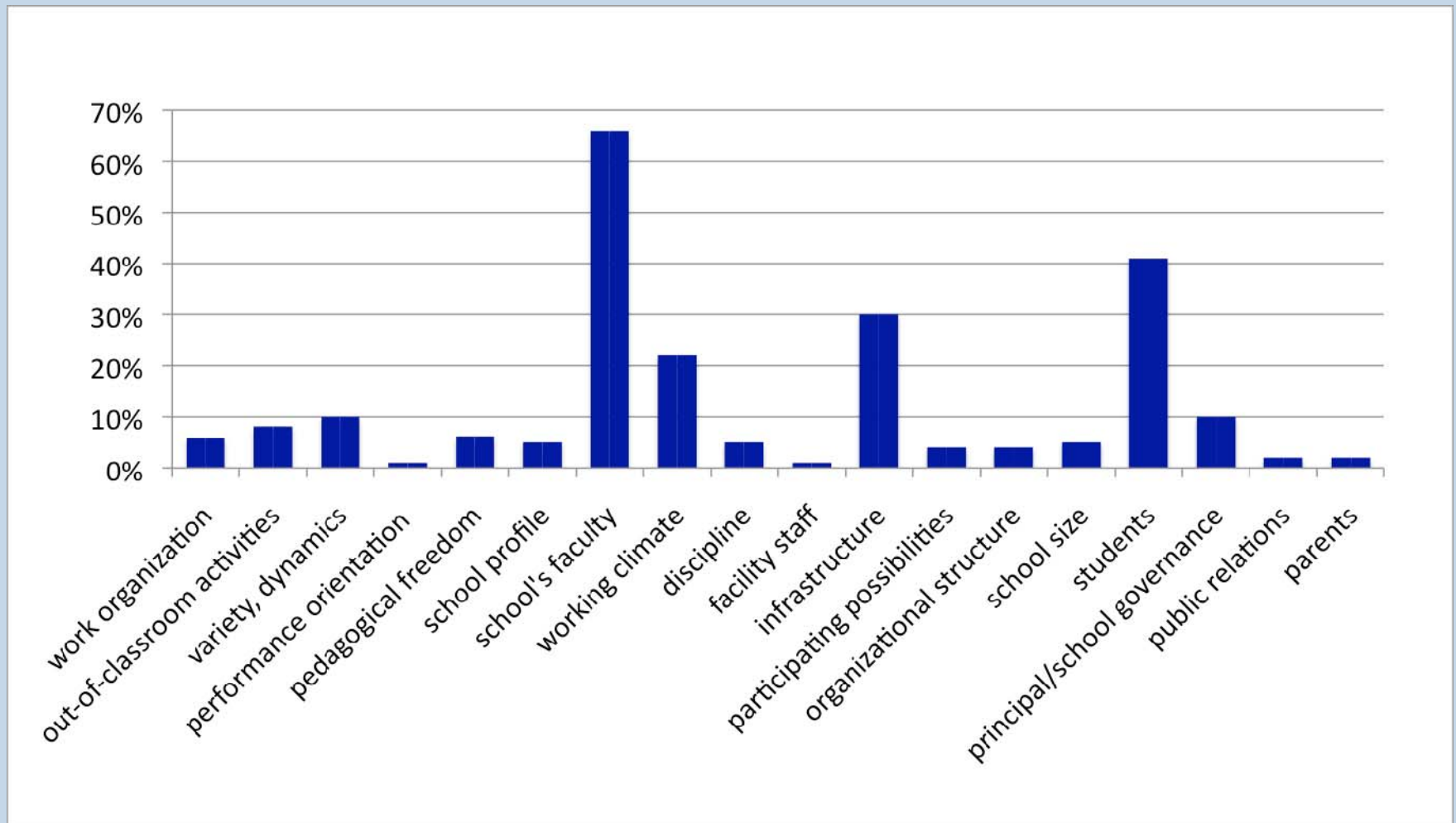
- qualitative

Concluding remarks

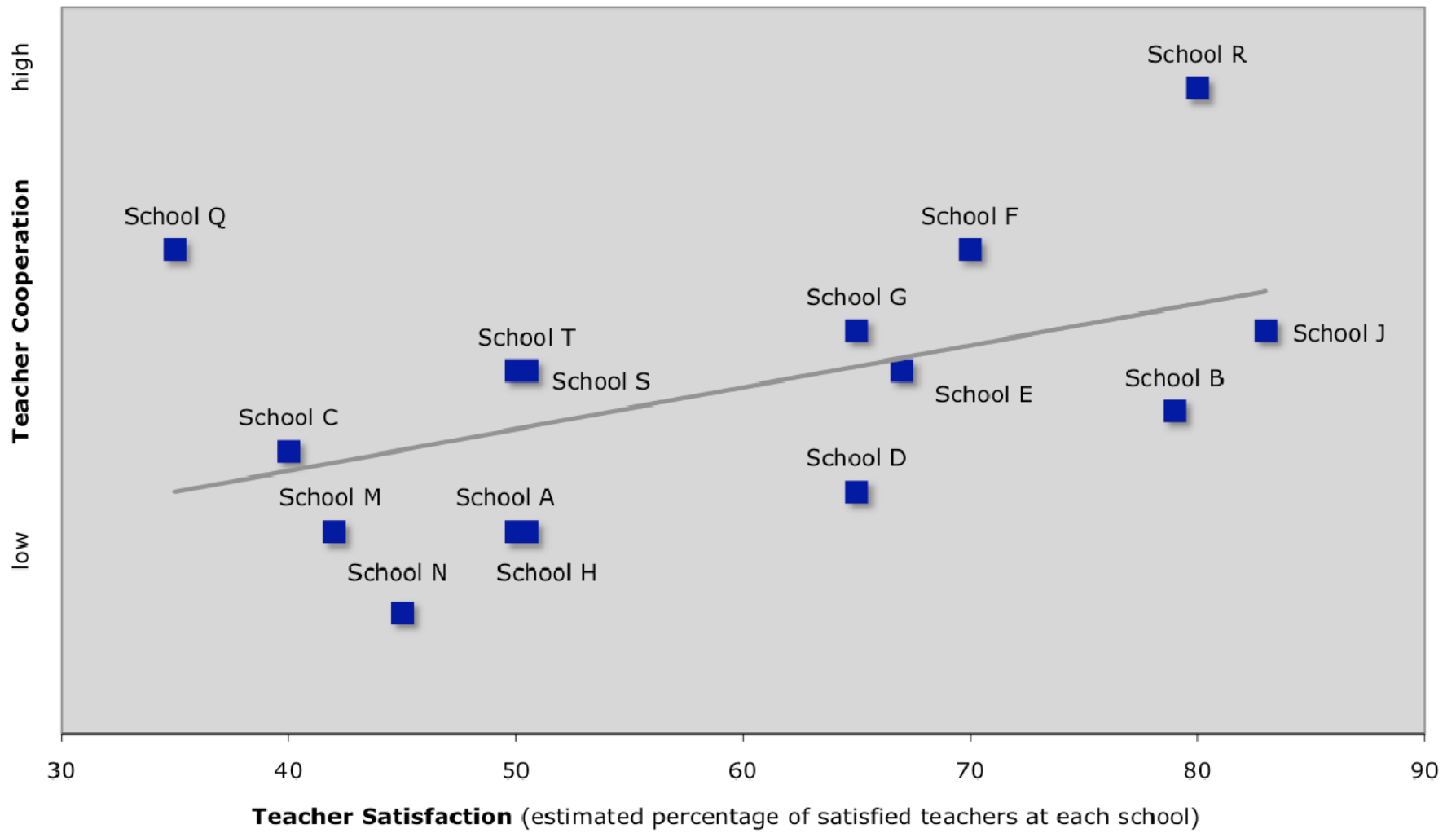
Discussion

# What teachers like about their schools

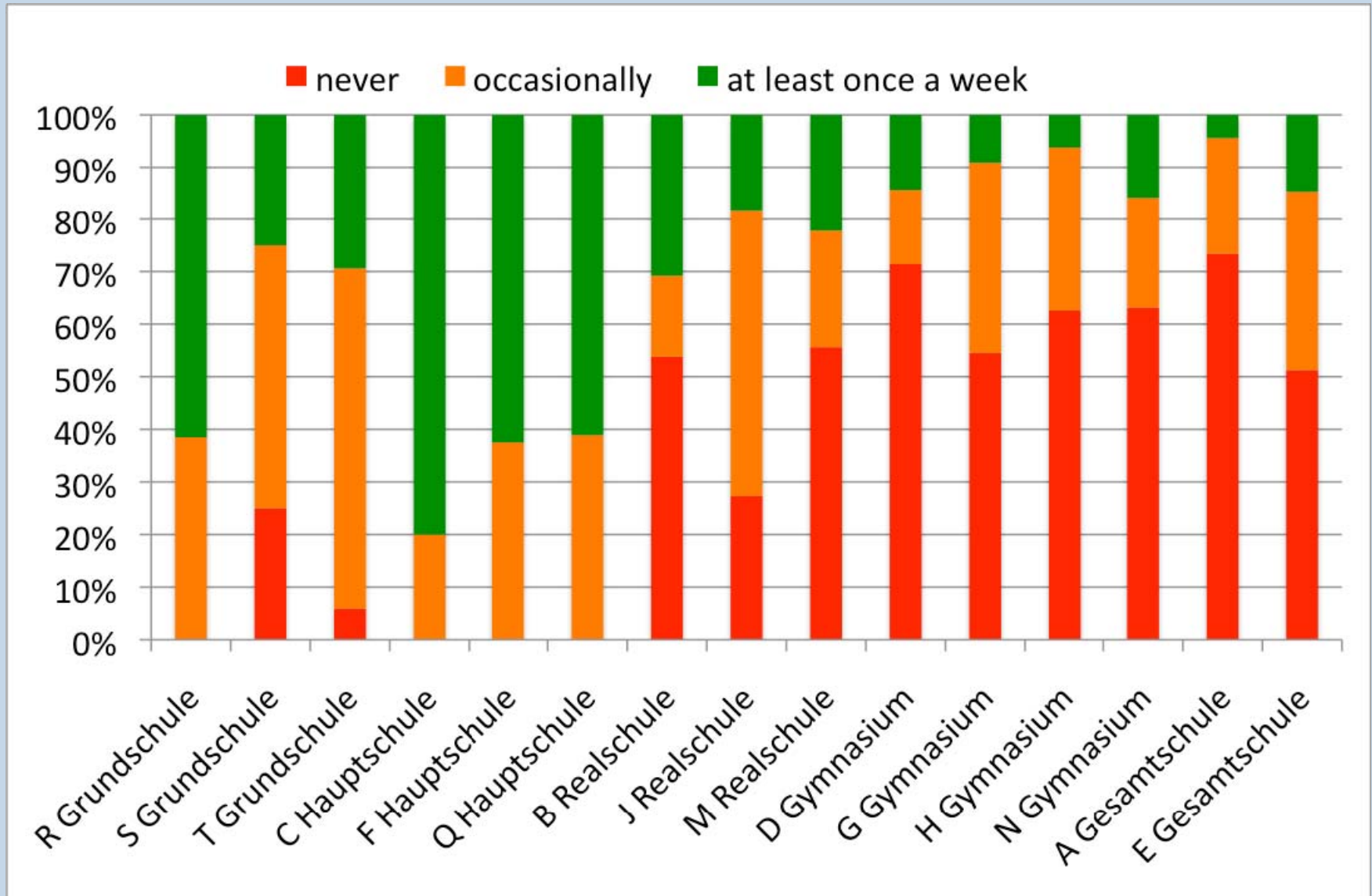
(percentage of teachers naming single features)



### Cooperation and Teacher Satisfaction



# How often do teachers teach together?



## Some quantitative results of the study

unexpectedly big differences between single schools

influence of the school type: generally more teacher collaboration in *Grundschulen* and *Hauptschulen* than in *Realschulen* and *Gymnasien*

advanced forms of collaboration, especially team teaching, are rarely applied and are limited mainly to *Grund-* and *Hauptschulen*

positive relation between teacher collaboration and work satisfaction, although exceptions can be found (and, of course, other factors contribute to satisfaction as well)

exceptional cases suggest that the culture of collaboration is strongly influenced by other conditions as well

→ qualitative approaches can help to understand collaboration in schools

# Content

Background: Why does teacher collaboration matter?

Research questions

Study design

**Results:** - quantitative

- **qualitative**

Concluding remarks

Discussion

## Research questions

To what extent do teachers collaborate?

**Which units of teacher collaboration are perceived as particularly helpful?**

Which changes result from intensified teacher collaboration in schools?

How can teacher collaboration be enhanced?

# Collaboration units inside schools

## Formal collaboration

subject teams

project teams or task groups

governing bodies

boards and committees

**task oriented collaboration**

teams per classroom

teams per age group

**student oriented collaboration**

## Informal collaboration

verbal and material exchange

common activities inside and outside school

## Research questions

To what extent do teachers collaborate?

Which units of teacher collaboration are perceived as particularly helpful?

**Which changes result from intensified teacher collaboration in schools?**

How can teacher collaboration be enhanced?

# Changes resulting from intensified teacher collaboration (1)

## **improved instructional quality:**

exchange and improvement of instruction designs and material

coordination and adjustment between teachers supports students' learning

more than one contact person for the students

common responsibilities make teachers help each other

complex tasks can only be solved by working together

team teaching requires the development of new instructional settings

## Changes resulting from intensified teacher collaboration (2)

### **Workload:**

exchange of working materials and preparations

no reduction of the work amount, even increasing obligations

by better results, teachers perceive themselves as more effective

sharing of problems and collegial support is perceived as big relief

less work pressure and stress perceived

## Changes resulting from intensified teacher collaboration (3)

### **Professional learning:**

reflection

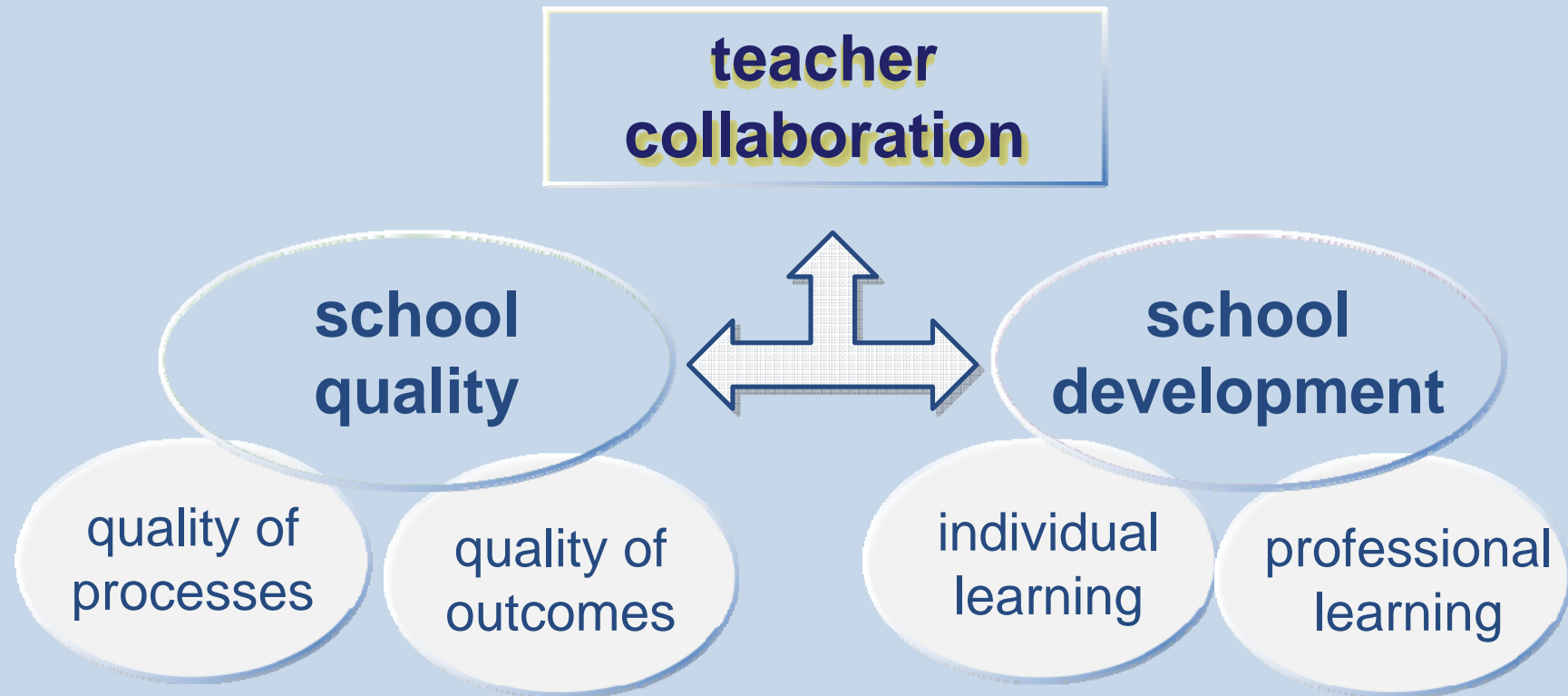
stimulation and new input from colleagues

reduced uncertainty in the professional self-perception

teacher collaboration as model for student collaboration

motivation and fun

# The meaning of teacher collaboration for schools



## Research questions

To what extent do teachers collaborate?

Which units of teacher collaboration are perceived as particularly helpful?

Which changes result from intensified teacher collaboration in schools?

**How can teacher collaboration be enhanced?**

## „Teacher collaboration: What works“

- create teacher teams
- common tasks and responsibilities
- team size no bigger than five
- interdisciplinary teams
- resources and rewards for teams, not for individuals
- scheduled time and space for meetings
- training and assistance for teacher teams
- material support

(Inger, 1993; with additions)

# Content

Research questions

Background: Why does teacher collaboration matter?

Study design

Results: - quantitative

- qualitative

**Concluding remarks**

Discussion

## Concluding remarks

- teacher collaboration is a matter of school governance and design
- teacher collaboration depends on a wide variety of conditions
- common tasks and responsibility are most important:  
*„Two fundamental conditions appear to be crucial to joint action among teachers: interdependence and opportunity“ (Inger, 1993)*
- allows peer feedback and enhances professional development
- working together is a fundamental change for most teachers and must therefore be carefully introduced, developed and accompanied
- closer coupling enables better coordination and governance in schools

**Thank you for your attention!**

ahlgrimm@bildungsmanagement.net  
huber@bildungsmanagement.net

# Literature

- Evans-Stout, K. (1998). Implications for collaborative instructional practice. In D. G. Pounder (Hrsg.), *Restructuring schools for collaboration: Promises and Pitfalls*. Albany: State University of New York Press, S. 121-134
- Goddard, Y. L., Goddard, R. D. & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2007). A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation of Teacher Collaboration for School Improvement and Student Achievement in Public Elementary Schools. *Teachers College Record*, 109(4), 877-896.
- Inger, M. (1993). Teacher Collaboration in Secondary Schools. *centerfocus 2*. National Center for Research in Vocational Education, University of California at Berkeley 1-4. Verfügbar unter: <http://vocserve.berkeley.edu/centerfocus/CF2.html> [25.3.2009 Access 1993].
- Huber, S. G., Hader-Popp, S. & Ahlgrimm, F. (2009). Kooperation in der Schule. In S. G. Huber (Hrsg.), *Handbuch für Steuergruppen*. Köln [u.a.]: Wolters Kluwer, S. 211-239
- Little, J. W. (1990). The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teachers' professional relations. *Teachers College Record*, 91(4), 509-536.
- Sammons, P. (1999). *School effectiveness: coming of age in the twenty-first century*. Lisse [u.a.]: Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Scheerens, J. & Bosker, R. J. (1997). *The Foundations of Educational Effectiveness*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Steinert, B., Klieme, E., Maag Merki, K., Döbrich, P., Halbheer, U. & Kunz, A. (2006). Lehrerverkooperation in der Schule: Konzeption, Erfassung, Ergebnisse. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 52(2), 185-203.