

TEACHER WORK ACTIVITY: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF WORK IN  
TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAMS (TATS)

A Dissertation

by

Linda Margaret McCalister

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TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAMS: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF WORK IN  
TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAMS (TATS)

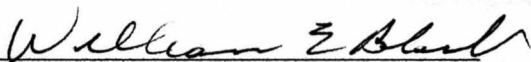
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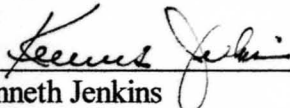
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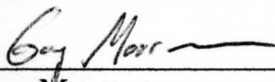
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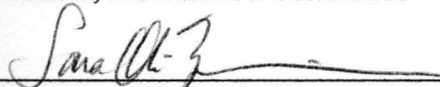
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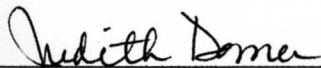
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## ABSTRACT

### TEACHER WORK ACTIVITY: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF WORK IN TEACHER ASSISTANCE TEAMS (TATS). (December 1998)

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Beginning in the late 1980's teacher teams began to emerge (Maeroff, 1993). This new trend in teacher work is part of an overall effort to reform schools. Very little research exists on the communicative dynamics of these new teacher work teams.

The teacher teams analyzed in this study worked in the context of a school-wide interdisciplinary teacher assistance team (TAT). The teams were formed by the local district and were to create interventions for children having behavioral and academic problems, as well as make placement recommendations for students qualifying for special education services. The teacher assistance teams were preceded by consultative and multidisciplinary teams composed of counselors, administrators, and psychologists who made placement decisions.

In this study of two TATs, how participants organized a teacher assistance team to do work was explored. Related questions included how the collective group accomplished its work and the individual contributions to the system. The tools, rules, community, and

objects that the teams used to mediate their activity were described. The primary method employed in this study was the application of cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) as a theoretical lens for viewing the activity system as the unit of analysis. The work of two teams from September 1996 to June of 1997 was followed.

Analysis revealed eight major phases of TAT development beginning with the consultative model in 1950 and ending with the interdisciplinary team in 1988. There were four major points of view or stances for speaking in the TAT, the individual/practical-oriented voice, the technical expert-oriented voice, the legal/bureaucratic/procedural-oriented voice and the collaborative-oriented voice. Although new ways of working emphasized interactive and collaborative ways of working, traditional ways of working pulled toward technical expert, practical, and legal/bureaucratic ways of working.

In addition, results indicated that the TAT was mediated by components of the activity system, which included the object, the rules, the division of labor, the community and the tools. A significant object that emerged was the student. The team used primary tools such as testing information to construct a "picture" of a student as well as secondary tools such as discourse, explanatory models of classroom behavior, and expectations and preconceptions.

Rules mediated the activity of the system by helping the participants coordinate their work. Rule use in these settings included rules that coordinated when someone was allowed to talk and rules that kept the meeting under control. Ventriloquism, a form of discourse, was used by the participants to keep the meeting under control.

Division of labor was determined by historical voice, expertise and volunteering. When historical voice determined the division of labor, the team, in effect, took up the voice to create a division of labor. The technical expert voice often emerged as a final decision maker. Volunteering was accomplished by the participant volunteering himself or herself and by participants volunteering one another. Those in historically powerful positions tended to talk more often and thus to influence the construction of the object.

Results also revealed the dominant use of argumentative, evidentiary, and orienting tools that participants used in TAT meetings. There were limited tools for organizing and maintaining the procedures of the team. The language surrounding tool use also revealed the use of secondary tools such as narrative, sentence completion, repetition, and overlapping. Tool use in TATs mediated the outcome of work. Tool use also created innovation or caused conflict.