

The Theoretical and Empirical Analysis of the Roles of Instructional Leadership, Teacher Collaboration, and Collective Efficacy Beliefs in Support of Student Learning

“Leaders have tremendous potential to influence collective work and beliefs of teachers in their schools” (p. 527).

What is this study about?

The researchers were interested in finding out how leadership impacts what teachers do to become more effective and argued that school environments are more productive when principals work collaboratively with teachers to develop collective expertise. The researchers were specifically interested in the relationship between instructional leadership, teacher collaboration, and collective efficacy and how this relationship impacted student learning. The researchers noted that collective efficacy beliefs influence the degree of persistence and creativity with which individuals and groups approach tasks, and they hypothesized that principal leadership and teacher collaboration would predict collective efficacy. The researchers also expected that principal leadership and teacher collaboration would both be positively and significantly related to student achievement indirectly through collective efficacy.

What’s Important

The researchers noted that strong instructional leadership “can serve to influence collective efficacy indirectly by setting normative expectations for formal, frequent, and productive teacher collaboration around instructional improvement” (p. 504). By promoting a culture of collaboration focused on instructional improvement, principals have the potential to support school improvement in ways that positively influence teachers’ collective efficacy beliefs and thus promote student achievement.



The Details of the Study

Participants/Method and Procedures:

A total of 1606 elementary teachers from 93 schools serving students in high-poverty areas in a Midwestern state comprised the sample for this study. The researchers administered surveys that were both valid and reliable in order to measure instructional leadership, teacher collaboration, and collective efficacy. Student achievement data (mathematics and reading achievement) was drawn from state databases. The relationships were tested using a statistical procedure called structural equation modeling, a technique that researchers use to analyze relationships among multiple variables in a complex data set.

Results:

There were four key findings:

1. The degree to which teachers collaborated to improve instruction was strongly predicted by principals' instructional leadership. Schools where principals were reported by teachers to frequently monitor instruction, and where they provide relatively strong instructional guidance, were characterized by high levels of collective work among teachers to improve instruction.
2. Teachers' collaboration for instructional improvement was a strong direct predictor of collective efficacy beliefs. When teacher collaboration was centered on instructional improvement in schools, it was "more likely to build real capability and hence, enhance the resolve of teachers that they possess the ability necessary to achieve student learning goals" (p. 504).
3. Principals' instructional leadership was a significant positive predictor of collective efficacy beliefs through its influence on teachers' collaborative work.
4. Perceived collective efficacy was a significant positive predictor of differences among schools in student achievement. The researchers noted that the "more robust the sense of collective efficacy characterizing the schools in our sample, the greater their levels of student achievement, even after controlling for school and student background characteristics and prior levels of student achievement" (p. 525).

Based on these findings, the researchers noted the importance of frequent, formal, and focused teacher collaboration. It was suggested that one of the most powerful forms of intensive collaboration is teachers observing others' classrooms because of the importance of vicarious experiences in enhancing efficacy beliefs.

Limitations:

One limitation of this study is that the research is based on correlational data and we, therefore, cannot determine that there is a causal relationship between instructional leadership and collective teacher efficacy. We assume from this study that instructional leadership creates the conditions that lead to increases in collective teacher efficacy but we are inferring a direction of causation.

Citation:

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What are the implications of this research for my practice?