Team Up for 21st Century Teaching and Learning

What Research and Practice Reveal about Professional Learning

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Condensed Excerpts

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This document contains excerpts from Team Up for 21st Century Teaching & Learning. For more information and information about how to obtain a complete copy of the book, please visit www.nctaf.org.

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Introduction to Learning Teams

Thomas Carroll, Ph.D., President
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Learning is no longer preparation for the job, it *is* the job. In a world in which information expands exponentially, today's students must learn to be knowledge navigators, seeking and finding information from multiple sources, evaluating it, making sense of it, understanding how to turn information into knowledge and knowledge into action. Among their myriad sources of information are knowledgeable others—peers, experts, families, and teachers. And, while it has long been acknowledged that learning is socially constructed through interaction with these knowledgeable others (Rogoff 1998), today's web of instant and nearly ubiquitous communication means that social learning skills are ever more possible and essential. Today's students are deeply immersed in these various and ever expanding learning environments.

What does this mean for teachers? First, as learners themselves, they can and should be constantly learning with and from their knowledgeable colleagues. They can and should model for their students the collaborative learning and knowledge construction that is at the core of 21st century competencies. But the reality is that the prevalent model of schooling today supports neither continuous job-embedded learning for teachers nor collaborative learning among teachers. Education is frequently fragmented and disconnected: professional development is not aligned with student and teacher needs, curriculum is not aligned with assessment, and standards are not aligned with curriculum. This fragmentation prevents any substantial education reform from taking place because changes in one area do not affect another. Collaborative teaching could bridge these gaps, but the reality is that today's teachers work alone—they spend an average of 93% of their official workday working in isolation from their colleagues, and more if one counts the hours of preparation and grading spent after school hours (MetLife 2009).

Too often teachers' personal learning and professional development is also isolated from their practice. Their officially sanctioned and supported learning opportunities are typically decided for them, in externally mandated professional development delivered in "drive-by workshops" designed for the mass, not for the individual teacher (NSDC 2009). They rarely have the opportunity to share their practice, reflect on what works or doesn't work with colleagues and other knowledgeable experts. They have few opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues to build an understanding of the learners in their charge or to create a curriculum progression that links their efforts to improve student achievement. Today's young teachers are especially eager to

work with their colleagues and students to transform their factory-era schools into 21st century learning centers. But, they find themselves working alone in self-contained classrooms where they are bound to the teaching practices of the past. Faced with a choice between working in the last century or the 21st century, these new teachers are voting with their feet. The young people we are counting on to teach for the future are leaving our obsolete schools at an alarming rate.

America's teaching force is in constant churn. New teachers come and go at ever increasing rates—the turnover among beginning teachers grows every year—and increased 40% over the last 16 years (NCTAF 2010). We have institutionalized high turnover and teacher attrition. The impacts on high need schools are most dramatic, but the problem occurs all across the education landscape. The reasons teachers give for leaving speak to the impacts of isolation: lack of support, lack of influence, classroom intrusions, and inadequate time to collaborate (NCTAF 2003). Up to 46%t of teachers leave their classrooms within the first five years of teaching. This turnover at the front end of teaching, combined with an ever greater percentage of teachers reaching retirement age, means that the experience level of teachers in schools today has dropped radically. In 1987-1988 the modal number of years of teaching experience in schools was 15 years, in 2007-2008 it was one year (that's right, one year!) (NCTAF 2010). With up to 54% of the teaching force made up of Baby Boomers due to retire in the next decade, we face a school staffing tsunami if we do not change the overall design of teaching (NCTAF 2010).

We can't just keep recruiting new teachers at the front end of the pipeline and expect they will stay. Because the turnover rate among young teachers is so high, the traditional practice of hiring new teachers, fresh out of college, does not provide a reliable solution to teacher shortages. "The relative odds of young teachers departing are 184% higher than for middle-aged teachers" (Ingersoll 2001, p. 17). Teacher turnover at any stage in the career is not a benign occurrence. According to NCTAF's national study on the financial cost of teacher turnover, the national cost of recruiting, hiring and retaining replacement teachers is over $7 billion a year (NCTAF 2007).

But along with this mountain of bad news comes a great opportunity to change the education system in the United States to meet the needs of 21st century learners. The 2009 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher* found that teachers are eager to team up in new roles. The survey found that teachers who are very satisfied with their careers are more likely to work in schools with higher levels of collaboration. Thirty-seven percent of teachers also say that they would be interested in a "hybrid role" (teaching in the classroom part-time while filling other roles in the school or district during the

remainder), and three-quarters of teachers believe that they will continue to work in education beyond traditional retirement in mentoring or coaching (MetLife 2009).

There is a pressing need for the nation's teachers to "transform their personal knowledge into a collectively built, widely shared, and cohesive professional knowledge base" to meet the needs of the Learning Generation (Chokshi and Fernandez 2005). Learning Teams make this possible. We have an opportunity to capitalize on the changing workforce to create intergenerational leaning teams that will provide new opportunities for collaboration among novice teachers and their accomplished colleagues. These learning teams would also establish a new pathway for Baby Boomers in government and industry who are eager to pursue encore careers in which they can give back to the next generation of youth without necessarily becoming a teacher of record (NCTAF 2009). The mentoring and support that learning teams, especially with the participation of retirees, provide for new and struggling teachers could reduce their isolation and their frustration with the shortcomings of stand-alone practice, and significantly increase retention rates.

Learning teams can stop the flow of beginning teachers out the door, create new roles for experienced teachers, and provide a way for schools to capitalize on the expertise and interest of retiring Baby Boomers. These claims move beyond a theory and have been proven by researchers in the field. NCTAF, with the support of the Pearson Foundation, is presenting both research studies to ground this theory, as well as case studies that demonstrate the power learning teams have to change the lives of today's teachers. The research reports and case studies in this book demonstrate that collaborative teams positively affect the rewards of teaching career, they improve instructional practice, enhance teaching effectiveness, and increase student achievement.

It is time to support schools where teamwork begins with systematic induction of new teachers into professional learning communities, and continues with support network of educators, who sustain their growth through professional development that is embedded in the day-to-day fabric of work in the school. It is time to develop learning teams that embed continuous professional development in schools that are constantly evolving to meet the needs of today's students. **It's time to team up for 21st century teaching and learning!**

Tom Carroll, Ph.D.
President
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Synthesis of the Research Findings

Transforming American education is the rallying cry heard through the land today. The Obama Administration focused the nation's vision for 2020 on two basic goals: assuring that every student is college and career ready, and closing the achievement gap for low-income students and children of color.

These are ambitious goals. Making it happen will require changes that go beyond tinkering with today's school designs. Curriculum, assessment, and instructional practices designed in the past are simply not adequate to meet these goals. The most critical redesign will be that of the teaching profession—the work of teachers and the way schools are staffed. The era of isolated teachers, working alone to meet the myriad needs of all their students, is neither educationally effective nor economically viable in the 21st century.

Just giving today's students a better factory-era school, with teachers delivering text-based instruction in stand-alone classrooms won't prepare them for the 21st century. Freeing teachers from their isolation with productive collaboration is the goal of what are variously called: communities of practice, teacher collaborative communities, learning teams, professional learning networks, or, most commonly, professional learning communities.

Over the last several decades, there have been hundreds of books, articles, conference presentations and web blogs about professional learning communities. Despite the fact that discussion and advocacy of these communities is "no longer unusual or controversial" and may "soon be as accepted a part of school life as notebooks, performance evaluations, and good old fashioned chalk" (Hargreaves 2007, p. 175) their effectiveness is not widely known.

Researchers have been looking for answers to these important questions: What makes for an effective learning community of educational professionals? What do we mean by effective: is it changes in pedagogy – the ways teachers teach – or growth in their knowledge of content in their subject areas; or both? More satisfied teachers and stable school communities? Or is the only metric that matters the "gold standard" of measurable gains in student achievement? To answer any one of these questions definitively would require far more than is attempted in this publication. Instead, we aim here to shed light on the impact of professional learning communities from an integrative perspective, one that draws on each of these important and likely symbiotic outcomes. We draw on two equally valid sources of knowledge—published research and skilled practice.

The research section provides a sample of core research articles that address the questions through several lenses—the impact on personal practice, the factors that are present in successful PLCs that last over time, and student outcomes on standardized tests. While our search for research studies uncovered hundreds of articles about the varying levels of effectiveness of professional learning communities, the articles presented here were chosen for the breadth of focus that they represented, from pure theory to deep practice. These five articles are exemplary in that they crystallize the key principles in effective learning communities, which we discuss later. Taken together the articles provide a substantial evidence-based argument for the power of collaborative communities to improve teaching and learning.

In Talbert and McLaughlin, we open with a theoretical discussion about the value of collaboration, and acknowledge that not everyone has bought into the idea that collaboration is a good thing in teaching. Talbert and McLaughlin find that rather than impeding "artisan" teachers from practicing their craft, professional learning communities provide the forum for these artisans to test and refine their theories in a supported environment. The authors also discuss the different perceptions of teachers in both weak and strong communities, and conclude that teachers in weak communities prefer isolation to the poor support of their fellow community members, while teachers in strong communities tend to feel that they have the power to help every student achieve because they are empowered by the knowledge and support of their colleagues.

Stoll, et al. synthesize findings about the influences of teacher professional learning from an extensive list of studies done around the globe. Through these studies, the authors outline the common elements of professional learning communities, impediments to success, and the power of outside partnerships to strengthen the communities. Then we learn about the positive effects learning teams can have on teaching practice and student learning in effective communities.

Goddard, et al. set out to test the hypothesis that teacher collaboration has a positive effect on teaching and learning, without limiting the definition of collaboration to a specific prescriptive form of teaming. The authors used survey data from a large urban district to determine whether teachers who report having more opportunities for collaboration have more or less successful students. Indeed, those teachers reporting more teacher collaboration in their schools taught in schools with higher student scores on standardized tests. The study confirms that collaboration has an effect without pinpointing one particular model as most effective.

Next we look to Gallimore, et al. to move past general collaboration to outline key factors that should be in place for the most effective teacher teamwork. Rather than taking for granted that any teacher collaboration is positive, they look at how teachers can be intentional about their collaborative learning in order to change their instructional practice. The program they evaluated was put into operation in two phases to improve fidelity of implementation and effectiveness.

Finally, Ermeling takes an in-depth look at one team of high school teachers that are using reflective inquiry to examine and change their practices. In this study, it should be noted that the researcher did not see dramatic effects in the first year of implementation. Instead, professional learning takes time to build from discussion of theory and student data into deep changes in classroom practices.

Equally powerful are the case studies written by skilled practitioners who are working today in PLCs in schools around the country. They share "knowledge in practice" (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1996) that puts a face on the daily work of teachers empowered to work together on deepening their own understanding of their students learning and how it can be enhanced. The teachers in each of these schools have redefined their roles as they have become members of a professional community composed of accomplished teachers, novice and student teachers, and teacher coaches. They work together to develop and refine a collectively built body of teaching knowledge and skills that can be customized to meet each student's learning needs. Each case study tells the story of the process of developing learning teams, overcoming obstacles, and ultimately changing teaching to improve learning and student achievement through collaborative work.

Though they are grounded into two levels of inquiry, common across both the case studies and the research reports are key principles of effective learning communities. Research provides evidence of the effectiveness of these elements, while the case studies confirm that evidence from the perspective of those doing the work on the ground and in the schools. The principles of success are:

- *Principle 1* – **Shared Values & Goals:** The team should have a shared vision of the capabilities of students and teachers. They should also clearly identify a problem around which the learning team can come together, with an ultimate goal of improving student learning.
- *Principle 2* – **Collective Responsibility:** Team members should have shared and appropriately differentiated responsibilities based on their experience and knowledge levels. There should be a mutual accountability for student achievement among all members of the learning team.

- *Principle 3* – **Authentic Assessment:** Teachers in the community should hold themselves collectively accountable for improving student achievement, by using assessments that give them real time feedback on student learning and teaching effectiveness. These assessments are valued – not because they are linked to high-stakes consequences – but because they are essential tools to improve learning.
- *Principle 4* – **Self-Directed Reflection:** Teams should establish a feedback loop of goal-setting, planning, standards, and evaluation, driven by the needs of both teachers and students.
- *Principle 5* – **Stable Settings:** The best teams cannot function within a dysfunctional school. Effective teams require dedicated time and space for their collaborative work to take place. This requires the support and, occasionally, positive pressure from school leadership.
- *Principle 6* – **Strong Leadership Support:** Successful teams are supported by their school leaders who build a climate of openness and trust in the school, empower teams to make decisions based on student needs, and apply appropriate pressure to perform.

In the following articles, we note where our outline of these principles intersects with the guiding frameworks and concepts used by the researchers and case study teachers and principals.

A growing number of education leaders across the country are increasingly committed to moving away from No Child Left Behind's reliance on single standardized assessments to more innovative approaches to hold themselves collectively and professionally accountable for student learning. Overall, the studies show us that when teachers are given the time and tools to collaborate they become life-long learners, their instructional practice improves, and they are ultimately able to increase student achievement far beyond what any of them could accomplish alone.

Professional Communities and the Artisan Model of Teaching

Joan E. Talbert & Milbrey McLaughlin

There are some who argue that teaching is an individual, artisan profession, and that learning communities stifle creativity. Talbert and McLaughlin argue that this is a false dichotomy. Great teaching is not merely about strong individual teachers, but about strong individuals in artisan communities that collaboratively support their continued improvement and growth. The characteristics of these communities affect the performance of the individual teachers who work in them. The authors demonstrate that teachers in strong professional learning communities benefit from the creative power of collaborative problem solving as well as increased feelings of efficacy and professionalism. In contrast, however, in weak communities teachers can be frustrated by isolation and lack of support, causing teachers to retreat into their stand-alone practice and shy away from any future collaboration.

Key Components of the Professional Learning Community

Talbert and McLaughlin use the following dimensions of the teaching career as a framework for a strong artisan community:

- *Colleague relations:* collaboration around instruction (Principle 1);
- *Basis for course assignment:* rotation and mentoring relations (Principle 6);
- *Instructional practice:* common craft, and shared knowledge, inquiry, and innovation (Principle 4);
- *Professional rewards:* Intrinsic rewards, collective progress, professional growth (Principle 2); and
- *Professional identity and commitment:* Artisan community participant, commitment to craft and community (Principle 2).

"…strong collaborative teacher communities engendered artisanship in teaching—by sustaining teachers' commitment to improving practice through dialog and collaboration around engaging students in school and content, and by sharing and investing repertoires of effective classroom practice."

Findings

Teaching is an artisan profession, and artisan professions are advanced by supportive artisan communities. Reconsidering the status-quo, innovation, collaborative learning, and improved practice are all characteristics of professional artisan communities.

Other Resources

Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., & Woolworth, S. (2001). Toward a Theory of Teacher Community. *Teachers College Record, 103*(6), pp. 942-1012.

Hargreaves, A. (2007). Leading Professional Learning Communities: Moral Choices Amid Murky Realities. In A. Blankstein, P. Houston, & R. Cole (Eds.), *Sustaining Professional Learning Communities* (175-195). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Warren Little, J. (2003). Inside Teacher Community: Representations of Classroom Practice. *Teachers College Record, 105*(6), pp. 913–945.

Full Citation

Talbert, J.E., & McLaughlin, M.W. (2002). Professional Communities and the Artisan Model of Teaching. *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice, 8*(3/4), pp. 325-343.

Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature

Louise Stoll, Ray Bolam, Agnes McMahon, Mike Wallace and Sally Thomas

The authors have conducted an extensive literature review of the research on professional learning communities from around the world. Professional learning communities are found to increase both the individual and group capacity of teachers to improve student learning. However, what professional learning communities are, in theory and practice, is not widely agreed upon or understood. The study sets out to "unpack" the meaning and dynamics of professional learning communities, what makes them effective, what those affects are (on teaching practice and student learning), and what outside forces influence the community, both positively and negatively. Five questions about professional learning communities are addressed:

1. What are professional learning communities?
2. What makes professional learning communities effective?
3. What processes are used to create and develop an effective professional learning community?
4. What other factors help or hinder the creation and development of effective professional learning communities?
5. Are effective professional learning communities sustainable?

Key Components of the Professional Learning Community

From the wide variety of surveys, a list of five shared characteristics of professional learning communities emerged:

- Shared values and vision (Principle 1);
- Collective responsibility (Principle 2);
- Reflective professional inquiry (Principles 3 & 4);
- Collaboration; and
- Group, as well as individual, learning is promoted (Principle 2).

Other research that these authors have conducted has reinforced those characteristics, while also highlighting mutual trust and respect, inclusive community membership (beyond only teachers), and an openness to use resources outside of the school for enhanced learning.

Findings

The authors conclude that, while professional learning communities are laborious to implement successfully, their potential for making long-term positive changes in teaching practice makes that effort worthwhile. They also note that many successful schools and districts capitalize on the support of outside agents with knowledge of data collection and analysis, content expertise, and experience building capacity for building and sustaining communities.

"…achievement gains for eighth and tenth grade students…were significantly higher in schools where teachers took collective responsibility for students' academic success or failure…."

Other Resources

Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., & Woolworth, S. (2001). Toward a Theory of Teacher Community. *Teachers College Record, 103*(6), pp. 942-1012.

Full Citation

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature. *Journal of Educational Change, 7*(4), pp. 22-258.

A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation of Teacher Collaboration for School Improvement and Student Achievement in Public Elementary Schools

Yvonne L. Goddard, Roger D. Goddard, & Megan Tschannen-Moran

While many studies focus on the effects of a particular intervention method, here the researchers used survey data without reference to a specific learning community model to determine how teacher collaboration, in general, affects student achievement. Teachers from 47 elementary schools in an urban district were surveyed to assess the amount of teacher collaboration they engage in, and those responses were compared with student achievement scores from each school. The research shows that student achievement is higher in schools where teachers report that they have more collaborative engagement with their colleagues.

Key Components of the Professional Learning Community

No specific parameters for collaboration were outlined. Using survey data about *all* collaboration, rather than focusing on one specific model of teacher collaboration, we can see the general effect of any type of collaboration on student data. While they cannot confirm it through this study, the authors speculate that "teacher collaboration fostered learning that improved instruction."

Findings

Teacher collaboration was found to have a statistically significant effect on student achievement on standardized math and science tests. More precisely, schools with one standard deviation increase in teacher collaboration showed a 0.7-0.8 standard deviation increase in fourth grade test scores. This holds true even when student characteristics (race, gender, socio-economic status) and school context (school size, prior student achievement) were taken into account.

"…fourth grade students have higher achievement in mathematics and reading when they attend schools characterized by higher levels of teacher collaboration for school improvement."

Other Resources

Bryk, A., Camburn, E., & Seashore, K. (1999). Professional Community in Chicago Elementary Schools: Facilitating Factors and Organizational Consequences. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 35*(Supplement, December 1999), pp. 751-781.

Bryk, A. (2010). Organizing Schools for Improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 91*(7), pp. 23-30.

MetLife (2009). *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Collaborating for Student Success*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

Full Citation

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), pp. 877-896.

Moving the Learning of Teaching Closer to Practice: Teacher Education Implications of School-Based Inquiry Teams

Ronald Gallimore, Bradley A. Ermeling, William M. Saunders, & Claude Goldenberg

This study examines changes in teacher perceptions, instructional practice, and student achievement in nine Title 1 schools that are implementing an inquiry-based protocol. The protocol was to: 1) set a student learning goal, 2) plan the instructional practice collaboratively, 3) implement the practice, 4) use a common assessment, and 5) move to a new topic if the learning goal is reached, or start over if it is not. In addition to student achievement gains, the study finds an important change in teacher attitudes among those participating in professional learning communities. Those teachers were more likely to attribute gains in student achievement to improved instructional practice, rather than to external factors such as student traits or socio-economic status. It is empowering for teachers to know that they can overcome external factors to increase student achievement when they use collaborative inquiry protocols to improve their instruction.

Key Components of the Professional Learning Community

A five-element framework was developed for the learning teams in this study:

- Set shared goals (Principle 1);
- Use meaningful indicators to measure progress (Principle 3);
- Capitalize on assistance by capable others (inside or outside the school);
- Use distributed leadership to support goal attainment (Principle 6);
- Provide a stable setting in which the meetings occur (Principle 5).

Findings

During the first two years of the project, no differences were seen between the schools implementing the learning teams protocol and the control schools. The lack of difference was attributed to an over reliance on school principals to be the program implementers, and a lack of fidelity in implementing the protocols. This caused researchers to establish a second phase of implementation, where leadership teams and

facilitators, comprised of teachers and administrators, from each school received training on the learning teams model. In the final three years of the study the implementing schools increased student achievement significantly over the comparison schools, even surpassing the district average. In the study schools, teachers were more likely to associate improved student achievement with improved instruction. Another key finding was that principal support is necessary to implement successful teams. Principals must balance an environment of supportive trust and collaboration, with appropriate pressure to ensure that teams continue to evolve and improve.

"Teachers in teams using the inquiry protocol began to assume 'you haven't taught until they've learned…'"

Other Resources

Borko, H., Jacobs, J., Eiteljorg, E., & Pittman, M.E. (2008). Video as a tool for fostering productive discussions in mathematics professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(2008), pp. 417-436.

Koellner, K., Jacobs, J., Borko, H., Schneider, C., Pittman, M.E., Eiteljorg, E., Bunning, K., & Frykholm, J. (2007). The Problem-Solving Cycle: A Model to Support the Development of Teachers' Professional Knowledge. *Mathematical Thinking and Learning, 9*(3), pp.273-303.

Saunders, W. M., Goldenberg, C.N., & Gallimore, R. (2009). Increasing achievement by focusing grade-level teams on improving classroom learning: a prospective, quasi-experimental study of Title 1 schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 46*.

Full Citation

Gallimore, R., Ermeling, B.A., Saunders, W.M., & Goldenberg, C. (2009). Moving the Learning of Teaching Closer to Practice: Teacher Education Implications of School-Based Inquiry Teams. *The Elementary School Journal, 109*(5), pp. 537-553.

Tracing the Effects of Teacher Inquiry on Classroom Practice

Bradley A. Ermeling

The following study was conducted with a small group of science teachers who worked together through a model of collaborative inquiry at a private high school. It was chosen for inclusion in the book to allow the reader to dive deeper into the story of how a particular approach to professional learning communities can affect teacher and student learning. While the study is small, it suggests that changes in classroom practice and improvements in student achievement are attainable when communities of teachers collaboratively focus on data about student learning.

Key Components of the Professional Learning Community

The author lays out a framework for learning teams in this study. The four components needed in learning teams focusing on collaborative inquiry are:

1. Identifying important instructional problems (Principle 1);
2. Connecting theory to action (Principle 4);
3. Utilizing evidence to drive reflection (Principle 3); and
4. Persistently working towards detectable improvements.

Findings

Teachers demonstrated changes in practice due to the collaborative inquiry process, and were able to pinpoint the process as the catalyst of that change. The author moves beyond the original framework to suggest that the core concepts necessary to establish and sustain teacher inquiry are:

- *Job-alike teams* which allow teachers to begin collaboration from the common ground of a subject matter or grade-level experience.
- *Distributed leadership* that allows one team member to act as a trained facilitator in order to guide the teacher inquiry process.
- *Inquiry-focused protocols* that provide the facilitator with structures for teacher collaboration but allow for flexibility to adapt to the current situation.
- *Stable settings* where time for collaboration is kept sacrosanct and cannot be changed or interrupted for purposes other than teacher inquiry.

"Using evidence from their own local implementation efforts, the teachers came to new understandings about how their instructional choices…influence students' opportunities to explore and understand scientific concepts."

Other Resources

Del Prete, T. (2001). *Improving the Odds: Developing Powerful Teaching Practice and a Culture of Learning in Urban High Schools.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Hollins, E.R., McIntyre, L.R., DeBose, C., Hollins, K.S., & Towner, A. (2004). Promoting a self-sustaining learning community: Investigating an internal model for teacher development. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 17* (2), pp. 247-264.

Phillips, J. (2003). Powerful Learning: Creating Learning Communities in Urban School Reform. *Journal of curriculum and Supervision, 18* (3), pp. 240-258

See also: The case studies in the next section of this book offer a look at how several other schools have implemented a learning teams program.

Full Citation

Ermeling, B. (2009). Tracing the effects of teacher inquiry on classroom practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 26* (3), pp. 377-388.

Case Study Selection and Common Themes

Now we move from the research realm into examples from practice that demonstrate how learning teams are affecting teachers, students, and administrators in districts across the country. In 2007 and 2008, Pearson Learning Teams sponsored a search for exemplary professional learning communities to be recognized at the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future's annual symposium with the Pearson Learning Teams Award. The following case studies were written by these award winners to illustrate how professional learning communities were established in their schools or districts. Each situation is unique in terms of student needs as well as available resources and supports for teaming. However, each school or district overcame obstacles standing in the way of progress to positively affect teacher effectiveness.

Criteria for Award Selection

Each year NCTAF gathered an advisory panel of education experts to discuss the characteristics that Pearson Learning Teams Award recipients should demonstrate. An important epiphany revealed by the advisory panel is that learning communities are not a destination but a process. Truly successful learning communities are constantly evolving to continuously improve teaching effectiveness and student achievement. Based on that realization, research was conducted to determine how well the schools met each of the criteria, and which strategies were most effective for them as they worked to improve the effectiveness of their teams. The criteria were:

1. Shared Vision & Goals (Principle 1);
2. Appropriate Scope and Composition to Address Goals (Principle 2);
3. Shared Responsibility (Principle 2);
4. Climate of Trust (Principle 6);
5. Stable Settings (Principle 5);
6. Feedback Loops (Principle 4);
7. Benchmarks of Progress towards Student Achievement (Principle 3);
8. Transparent Learning Teams Processes; and
9. Placement Along the Continuum of Collaboration

These criteria closely align with the key principles of professional learning communities that we found in the research synthesis.

Papillion-La Vista School District – Papillion-La Vista, NE
2007 Pearson District Learning Team Award Recipient

This district-wide professional learning communities initiative began in 2002 in Papillion-La Vista School District. Every teacher participates in two teams: *Classroom Assessment Teams* (which meet during the reserved monthly professional development time) and *Curriculum Toolbox Teams* (which meet weekly). Teachers in all teams take turns with roles and responsibilities in order to achieve distributed leadership in the teams and school. Each school has a school improvement team, comprised of both teachers and administrators, which uses the data collected by the *Classroom Assessment and Curriculum Toolbox* teams to set building goals for teaching and learning. Administrators also participate on their own teams to develop leadership goals across the district.

Principles addressed: Shared Values & Goals (1), Collective Responsibility (2), Authentic Assessment (3), Self-Directed Reflection (4), and Stable Settings (5).

Newark Public Schools – Newark, NJ
2008 Pearson District Learning Team Award Recipient

Newark Public Schools implemented learning teams in 2005 in twelve elementary and middle schools in a socio-economically disadvantaged region of the district. Each school has grade level teams that meet between 50 and 90 minutes each week. They use common assessment and teaching interventions to respond to student needs. The lead teacher from each grade level is on the school Instructional Leadership Council that meets with the principal, and the district holds monthly cross-school institutes for collaboration among the grade-level teams. Principals also meet and work together on a monthly basis.

Principles addressed: Shared Values & Goals (1), Authentic Assessment (3), Self-Directed Reflection (4), Stable Settings (5), and Strong Leadership Support (6).

Wilmington Middle School – Wilmington, CA
2007 Pearson School Learning Team Award Recipient

Teachers at Wilmington Middle School have been collaborating in learning teams since 2003 and began working with Pearson Learning Teams in 2006 to take their teams to the next level. The teams originally began in just the math department, but have been expanded to organize the entire school into both grade level and content teams. Teachers use common assessments and feedback loops – discuss a lesson, teach it, and reflect on its success – to reach their learning teams goals.

Principles addressed: Authentic Assessment (3), Self-Directed Reflection (4), Stable Settings (5) Strong Leadership Support (6).

References

Borko, H., Jacobs, J., Eiteljorg, E., & Pittman, M.E. (2008). Video as a tool for fostering productive discussions in mathematics professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(2008), pp. 417-436.

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Del Prete, T. (2001). *Improving the Odds: Developing Powerful Teaching Practice and a Culture of Learning in Urban High Schools.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Chokshi, S, & Fernandez, C (2005). Reaping the Systemic Benefits of Lesson Study, *Phi Delta Kappan, 86*(9), pp. 674-680.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. L. (1999b). The teacher researcher movement: A decade later. *Educational Researcher, 28*(7), pp. 15-25.

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