Teacher Collaborative Routines

> "The very reason any organization is established is to bring people together in an organized way to achieve a collective purpose that cannot be accomplished by working alone."
>
> **- DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, and Mattos (2016)**

Why focus on this?

For the last 25 years in education, there has been a greater understanding that collaboration drives both individual and school improvement. John Hattie, on his well-known "Visible Learning" website documenting his meta-analyses of research, found that nothing has a greater impact on student learning than organizing teachers into collaborative teams and convincing them, that if they work together, they can have a positive impact on learning for every student in their classroom (www.visiblelearningmetax.com).

Most of the research on successful schools that look at connections between teachers, the curriculum, instruction, and student learning have recognized that simply giving teachers time to collaborate is not a panacea. It is merely a start to a much more comprehensive way of using shared experience and individual expertise to improve group and individual practice.

This is where Teacher Collaborative Routines come in. These routines integrate three core sets of practices into an ongoing set of collaborative activities that support the individual learning and practice of each teacher, while also improving the group. Ideally, they lead to improved teacher collective efficacy, which has the most significant correlation with student growth and achievement.

Collaboration among educators is not a new concept - research on successful schools has often noted the presence of a collaborative culture as a core quality. Research on these schools, as well as on common practices in countries such as Japan, recognized that providing teachers with time to collaborate to develop their content knowledge and to understand the ways students learn content were critical to improving teachers' instructional practices (Corcoran, 1995). From these earlier studies, educational leaders like Richard DuFour examined such work and developed a new framework of "Professional Learning Communities" or PLCs, to frame the goal and process of such collaboration (DuFour, 1995 & 2016).

Unfortunately, something happened as PLCs became more commonplace in schools throughout the country. The gains in teacher efficacy and student learning were not always happening when PLCs were adopted and became widespread (Andrews-Larson et al, 2017; Spillane, Shirrel, & Sweet, 2017).

Several studies found that simply setting the stage for teacher collaboration by providing time for collaboration or setting goals or planning related tasks for these opportunities did not result in a focus on improving instruction. To achieve the goal of improved instruction, researchers found effective collaboration among instructional teams includes ALL of the following elements:

- *Clear communication of purpose*
- *Training in collaboration processes*
- *Training on data inquiry and problem-solving*
- *Ongoing guidance and protocols around the inquiry process.*

These elements are collective in that without all four solidly in place, collaboration struggles to address instruction (Min et al, 2016; Sterrett, Parker, & Mintzner, 2018).

Teacher Collaborative Routines are designed to be a deliberate collection of structured practices that not only incorporate the elements listed above, they specifically engage in three core practices that have been identified in multiple studies and meta-analyses to lead to collective teacher efficacy.

"Collective teacher efficacy refers to a staff's shared belief that through their collective action, they can positively influence student outcomes, including those who are disengaged and/or disadvantaged." (Donohoo, 2017). It is a collective mindset and culture that is built over time through a focus on coherence among all stakeholders in the school (Fullan and Quinn, 2016) and teachers having regular visible evidence of progress in student learning (Hattie, 2008).

As with any systems-based framework, this coherence and regular review of evidence comes through a collective set of routine practices that teachers engage in during collaboration. Initially, collaboration starts around the planning of instruction, so that ideas and strategies, as well as their perceived impacts on student engagement and learning, are shared and discussed (Venables, 2018). These collaborations often occur among common subject areas or grade levels, and usually result in products, such as common assessments, shared lessons, and commonly used instruction and management techniques in the classroom.

The second area of collaboration centers on review of student work and progress, and may often be organized around needs of individual students. Collaborative teams often use structured protocols for reviewing student work and making recommendations for instructional practice and/or intervention for individual students (Thompson et al, 2009; Lewis et al, 2010). Most Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) protocols are organized around these practices.

The third area of collaboration, which typically takes place after the other two are well established, involves regular observation of peers by teachers. Like Instructional Leadership Routines, these observations can be used for non-evaluative coaching and collection of classroom information that is used both to inform instruction and support the needs of individual learners (Robbins, 2015; Kaufman and Dolci-Grimm, 2013). Ideally, the dialogue during these collaborations is used to inform and improve the Instructional System at the building and district (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018).

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