



## **The importance of building collective teacher efficacy Leadership and accountability are critical to student access**

By Stephanie Pierce | September | October 2019

Principals are held accountable for improving student achievement in their schools. Even as some research questions the effects of principal leadership on achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003), scholars continue to explore this complex dynamic, attempting to understand the degree to and manner in which principals influence student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Further, Leithwood et al. suggested that leadership not only matters, but it is also second only to teaching as school-related factors in its impact on student learning. In fact, research suggested that principals might impact achievement through the mediating influence of collective teacher efficacy (Ross & Gray, 2006). Collective teacher efficacy is “the perceptions of teachers in a school that the efforts of the faculty as a whole will have a positive effect on students” (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000). Building on earlier studies of individual teacher efficacy, research on collective teacher efficacy further investigated the effects of teachers’ perceptions of their collective capacity to improve learning experiences and results for their students.

Schools are under pressure to succeed, and educational research continues to seek what factors contribute to student success. Hallinger and Heck suggest that principals impact student outcomes by creating staff commitment and positive school culture. Educational research has

shifted to not only include examining factors in effective schools, but also looking at what factors contribute to effective leaders (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Uline, Miller, & Tschannen-Moran, 1998), shifting the focus from technical aspects of leadership to more interpersonal skills of the school leaders (Fullan, 2002; Sergiovanni, 2006).

### **The importance of creating conditions for efficacy**

A leader's ability to behave in ways that build relationships may enhance and develop collective teacher efficacy. According to Goldman, leaders who are competent in social awareness were able to collaborate and cooperate with others to develop shared goals, and they were able to share plans, information, and resources (Goldman, 1998). Further, leaders competent in relationship management were able to model team qualities such as helpfulness, cooperation, and respect, and include all members in participation. These leaders and teams built a team identity and commitment and shared credit for accomplishments. These skills are necessary for the development of collective efficacy among teachers as described in the research. These skills seem to undergird the identified components of Emotional Intelligence and therefore the relationship on promoting efficacy.

The concept of leadership has been extensively researched, yet this construct has proved to be a complex and challenging topic to accurately define and measure (Bass, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005). After a comprehensive review of leadership literature, Bass concluded, "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept." Further, Bass noted that the definitions have evolved over the last 30 years in a systematic fashion based on models and theory building. Some of the challenges relate to: (a) the difficulty for researchers to provide a consistent definition of leadership, (b) the situational nature of leadership, and (c) the extensive focus on measurement of trait or personality characteristics, making it difficult to design leadership development training (Bass, 1990). Clearly leadership is often evaluated by an organization's achievement, which includes a strong, healthy culture. Strong educational leadership has been linked to student achievement.

### **Collective efficacy**

In the 1990s, Albert Bandura, a psychologist at Stanford University, recognized academic progress in schools reflects the collective whole, not only a reflection of the sum of individual contributions. Further, Bandura found teachers working together who developed a strong sense of collective efficacy within the school community contributed significantly to academic achievement.

Primary among their goals as instructional leaders, principals seek to know what factors contribute to students' academic success. Social cognitive theory asserts that individual and collective efficacy beliefs are influenced by the dynamic interplay between personal factors, environment and behavior. Efficacy beliefs impact how people feel, act, think and motivate themselves. Through the interactive social processes within a school, these efficacy beliefs develop as individuals come to believe they can make a difference through their collective efforts (Bandura, 1997). Bandura argued that the collective efficacy of teachers was associated with student achievement. Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy identified collective teacher efficacy as a stronger predictor of student achievement than socioeconomic status. This finding holds great

significance for school leaders, especially if principals can competently influence the collective teacher efficacy in a school.

School success is typically measured in terms of student achievement. Every school district faces an immense challenge to ensure improving student achievement. The literature suggests that a strong predictor for student achievement is collective teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Ross & Gray, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004). Bandura asserted that the collective efficacy of teachers was associated with student achievement. Principals play a central role in supporting teacher coordination and identifying support structures that nurture the development of collective teacher efficacy. A high sense of collective teacher efficacy directly influences teachers developing a commitment to new ways and beliefs.

Teachers work within a complex social organization. Within schools, students, teachers and administrators develop relationships that affect the organizational structure and culture. According to social cognitive theory, teachers' perceptions of self and the organization influence their actions. Bandura noted that collective efficacy develops when a group persists at goals, take risks together, and has a willingness to stay together. Ross and Gray identified this willingness of a group to stay together as making a professional commitment. "People do not live their lives in individual autonomy. Indeed, many of the outcomes they seek are achievable only through interdependent efforts. Hence, they have to work together to secure what they cannot accomplish on their own" (Bandura, 2000).

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#### **Four sources of collective teacher efficacy**

The formation of collective teacher efficacy builds on the model of self-efficacy formulated by Bandura. Collective teacher efficacy is an attribute at the group level. Goddard defines collective efficacy as, "the perceptions of teachers in a school that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students" (Goddard, 2003). Bandura suggests that organizations identify shared beliefs that focus on the organization's capabilities to innovate in order to achieve results.

Similar to self-efficacy, collective teacher efficacy is influenced by the dynamic interplay between personal factors and behavioral and environmental forces. Environmental forces include community expectations and perceptions of the school. Personal and behavioral forces include social norms about how people interact within the school context. Collective teacher efficacy develops based on a collective analysis of the teaching and learning environment and the assessment of the faculty's teaching competence. Collective efficacy beliefs also emerge from the effects of mastery experiences and vicarious learning experiences, verbal persuasion and the emotional state of the organization.

Mastery experiences have also been identified as the strongest predictor in developing collective efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). Mastery experiences at the organizational level can include the community developing goals and engaging in learning activities as a community to improve their teaching. As the school experiences success in student outcomes, the organization believes that

they can make a difference and this momentum continues. These successes build confidence and resiliency. Goddard et al. also found that mastery experience was strongly related to collective teacher efficacy. This mastery experience at the organizational level suggests professional learning communities as a component of collective efficacy (Ross & Gray, 2006).

Further, individual teachers develop in-depth knowledge that they share with the community through vicarious experiences such as demonstration lessons. In addition, school members may visit other effective schools to study their practices. School teams observe the successful practices of other teams and schools. In essence, this source is modeling effective practices.

School members provide feedback and share ideas with one another as part of verbal persuasion. School leaders have the opportunity to provide descriptive feedback to teachers to increase their rate of learning. School leaders who focus on productive, appreciative feedback can create the conditions for teachers to grow professionally sharing knowledge and skills, and collectively commit to working together. Activities such as book studies, workshops, professional development opportunities and feedback about achievement can inspire action.

School members who have a strong sense of collective efficacy take on different roles to support the emotional state and value differences among each other, thereby decreasing the effects of stress, fear and anxiety by barriers. Safety and trust are essential ingredients for collective teacher efficacy and a healthy organizational culture. Trust among teams can translate to members who respect and listen to one another, willingly share knowledge and ideas, and feel empowered and accepted within the team.

In fact, mastery experience, vicarious experience and verbal persuasion all help to diminish anxiety and develop a higher collective sense of efficacy. Bandura writes, “people who judge themselves to be socially efficacious seek out and cultivate social relationships that provide models on how to manage difficult situations, cushion the adverse effects of chronic stressors, and bring satisfaction to people’s lives” (Bandura, 1993). Further, a strong sense of efficacy allows the group to remain task oriented in the face of pressing demands or threats of failure.

Schools act purposefully in pursuit of their educational goals, such as improving student achievement. Another school may purposefully focus on improving teacher retention. These purposeful pursuits reflect the exercise of organizational agency (Goddard, 2003). Collective teacher efficacy is more than the aggregate of individual teacher efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997). It is based on social perceptions of the capability of the whole faculty and an assessment of the overall school’s performance (Goddard et al., 2000). Teachers assess their faculty’s teaching skills, methods, training and expertise to determine whether or not they believe the staff to be capable of achieving success. Setting challenging goals and a staff’s persistence in achieving success are associated with high levels of collective teacher efficacy. In turn, a school with low collective teacher efficacy tends to demonstrate less effort, a propensity to give up, and lower expectations for student performance.

Hoy, Sweetland, and Smith identified organizational factors promoted by school leaders that may have influenced collective teacher efficacy. These leaders promoted mastery experiences for teachers in which conditions were created for student success. Teachers had opportunities to

participate in staff development that involved observing other colleagues. Leaders also used verbal praise to reinforce teacher behaviors that promoted student success. Leaders modeled and influenced teachers to tolerate pressures and conflicts and develop the ability to persist despite setbacks. A healthy school culture generates high levels of commitment to the mission of the organization, as well as high levels of trust and collaboration, all linked to the construct of collective teacher efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy & Tarter, 1997). Hattie and Zierer suggested that teachers and leaders believe it is a fundamental task to evaluate their practice based on student progress. They also believe success and failure in student learning outcomes is more about their actual practice and they value solving problems of practice together.

Effective leaders influence, inspire, support, serve, communicate, adapt, and empathize. These school leaders demonstrate self-confidence and optimism and they possess strong organizational and political awareness. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty identified situational awareness as a highly effective leadership behavior in managing change within a school. Further, these principal leadership behaviors appear to be an essential component in fostering a school culture that promotes collective teacher efficacy. (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Kouzes & Posner, 1998; Krug, 1992)

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