

How does teachers' collective responsibility for student learning develop?

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What is teachers'
collective
responsibility?

Collective responsibility matters

- Taking responsibility for student learning is considered an essential part of teaching and pedagogical leadership.

Why teachers' collective responsibility matters

- Positive results of teachers taking collective responsibility for student learning are linked to higher achievement gains and more equitable distribution of achievement in disadvantaged social groups (Lee & Smith, 1996).
- Collective responsibility has also been linked to other variables such as teachers' participation in professional community where participants take joint responsibility for monitoring the quality of instruction, pedagogy and student learning outcomes (Bolam et al, 2005).
- Teachers' collective responsibility for performance has been reported as teachers' offering assistance to colleagues in matters of instruction, volunteering for additional assignments, and contributing extra effort in creating opportunities for student learning (Kruse 1995).
- Collective responsibility is also related to relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2009).

Overview of the research

- Limited prior studies investigating CR
- Research study conducted 2004-2010
- Mixed methods (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2002)
- Multiple case study – 2 secondary and 2 primary schools
- Data collected in 2007
- 59 item survey – five constructs: professional community; individual responsibility; collective responsibility, teacher-to-teacher trust; experiences of professional development
- 72 semi-structured interviews: group and individual – purposive sampling

Five dimensional model for CR



Reforming professional development

The four schools all undertook different approaches to reforming professional development to better meet the learning needs of their students.

Key elements included

- teacher efficacy about whether they feel their efforts are making a difference to students' learning
- an imperative to restructure teachers' work to promote collaboration on the quality of their teaching with an explicit focus on student learning and how teachers developed relational trust
- the degree to which shared high expectations for both colleagues' work and student achievement operate in concert impacts on the degree to which teachers' collective responsibility develops.

Forming professional community

In each school, to varying degrees, it was expected that teachers' engagement in professional development would involve them in:

- cycles of critical analysis of and reflection on teaching practice that had the potential to improve student achievement
- collaborative processes associated with building professional community such as:
 - deprivatising classroom practice through peer observations
 - joint construction of classroom and assessment tasks
 - developing shared norms and understanding of what needs to improve
 - flexibility to form and reform self-selected groups to address new student learning challenges

Engaging in collective struggle

Each of the four schools engaged in collective struggle to improve student learning in different ways. The socio-cultural and micro-political contexts of the schools in my study were influential in shaping how teachers developed and responded to shared goals for change, and in whether responding to these goals represented a form of collective struggle transitioning into collective responsibility. Shared goals to improve students' achievement represented a stimulus for change.

I argue that such imperatives can unite teachers in a collective struggle to address the adversity of challenging student behaviour and perceived influence of socioeconomic disadvantage on students' learning.

Developing relational trust

Teacher-to-teacher trust relates to the organisational culture in schools, in particular, how teachers' perceive the coherence between the school's professional development programs and the agreed goals for student learning. This in turn affects the extent to which teachers commit their efforts to improve the quality and consistency of teaching and the specific goals and values that are shared across the school community.

At all four schools the degree to which teachers were willing to give colleagues unconditional support had a direct impact on the extent to which collective responsibility appeared to develop. Aspects such as the level of consistency in the agreed standards for teaching and the degree to which teacher learning was focused on a set of shared educational goals impacted on the level of relational trust. I found that relational trust is not easily acquired and takes time to develop.

Exerting pedagogical leadership

For collective responsibility to be embedded in the normative culture of a school, pedagogical leadership is:

- modelled on consultative and transparent decision-making practices in order to address the pressing challenges of teaching
- a reciprocal relationship
- based on leaders understanding the challenges teachers face in changing/improving practices
- based on respect for leaders as “knowledgeable others”
- focused on challenging low expectations and taken-for-granted assumptions about student achievement

I propose that the quality of pedagogical leadership directly influences the extent to which teachers’ collective responsibility for student learning develops in a school.

Status check

- *Building organisational capacity to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning;*
- *A growing sense of collective efficacy;*
- *Encouraging a greater sense of ownership for the quality of students' learning.*

- What structures already exist to build pedagogical leadership capacity ?



- Who volunteers, who leads, who resists?



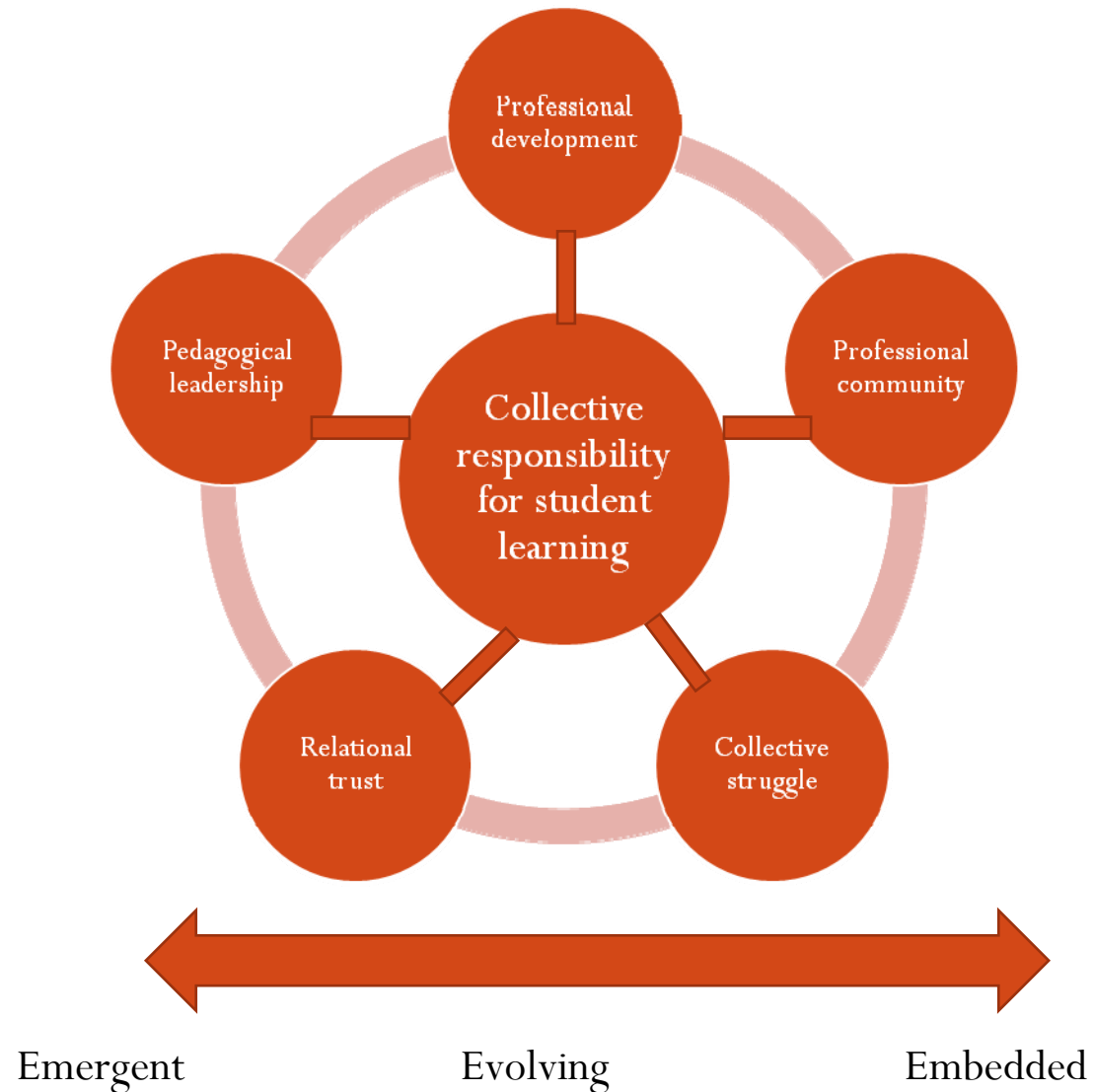
- How are leadership capabilities developed and practised using strategies like action learning, action research and lesson study, what else?



- Are there cultures within the school that support teachers to engage in collaborative lesson observation, critique and feedback?



Collective responsibility as a model for whole schools improvement



Key actions – what does this look like in your school?

- Reforming teachers professional development
- Forming professional community
- Engaging in collective struggle
- Developing relational trust
- Taking pedagogical leadership

