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Understanding Impact to Foster Collective Efficacy

By John Hattie, Jenni Donohoo and Peter M. DeWitt

Success in schools lies in the strength of believing that through their combined efforts, principals and their faculty can accomplish great things for the learning lives of students. Collective efficacy is the shared conviction that educators make a significant contribution in raising student achievement.

Regardless of the challenges posed by the current pandemic, the communities in which students live and/or their home environments, when a faculty believes they have what it takes to positively influence student outcomes, measurable improvements are realized. Principals play a key role in the maintenance of collective teacher efficacy – especially in the time of COVID-19 (Donohoo, 2020).

When leaders work to build collaboration with and amongst their teachers and support them in ways to ensure they can be successful, it goes a long way toward developing a shared sense of efficacy. Fostering collective efficacy requires instructional leaders who create high trust climates, demand high expectations, and legitimize and support a narrative of learning.

Instructional leaders (d=0.42) share their interpretations of the impact of teachers and are vitally and continually concerned with the teachers' and the school's impact on student learning. They also consider *their* contributions to student achievement. "How leaders think about the impact of what they do is more important than focusing on what they do" (Hattie & Smith, 2021).

Considerations in Understanding Impact

Collective efficacy is fed by evidence of impact. When educators recognize they are making progress and interpret improvement through a growth mindset, efficacy is enhanced. Therefore, it's important for principals to engage in collaboration with teachers, where they model and work with teachers to know and evaluate individual and collective impact. This starts by being explicit with teachers and students about what success looks like, what a year's growth for a year's input means, and helping teachers understand the concept of impact (about what, for whom, and how much).

Validity

With a spirit of trust and support, school leaders can help teachers determine specific outcomes in which to focus their efforts. This first important consideration in understanding impact deals with validity. Examples of impact during COVID-19 might include evidence that students' daily experiences, whether they be in-person or learning from home, are engaging. Questions to consider validity impact include:

- Do students have opportunities to move beyond 'doing their best?'
- Are students being appropriately challenged in their learning?
- Do students understand what success means for the tasks they are assigned?
- Are students meeting the time, participation and accountability expectations within hybrid, remote or in-person learning?

The most important work that principals and teachers can do regarding validity impact is to determine outcomes that are worthwhile and challenging and focus efforts on achieving those goals.

Equity

Another aspect in understanding the concept of impact relates to equity. Is the impact equitable? The most likely implication of the disruption of students' learning during COVID-19 relates to issues of inequity. During the time of COVID schools have seen students who are not able to fully engage because they are taking care of siblings while parents are at work (DeWitt, 2020a). Students who come from well-resourced homes are likely to experience greater success than students from lower resourced families who have increased demands on their time at home. The effect of home resources is powerful (d=0.51). To realize equitable impact, it is important for principals and teachers to understand how extensive their impact is and work toward achieving positive results for *all* students.

Magnitude

A third aspect in understanding impact relates to the desired magnitude. How great an impact is the team seeking to achieve? Even though COVID-19 has presented challenges, there are opportunities to exploit the use of technology and increase the power of social media to enhance learning. Teachers can create opportunities for social interaction using tools such as Edmodo, Flipgrid and Mural. It is important to remind teachers that it's not the time in class (nor the medium), *but what they do with the time they have* that really matters.

In a survey of over 400 students from three different countries, students identified collaboration with their peers as one of the most valuable strategies that kept them engaged over the past months (DeWitt, 2020b). Teachers can use technology to ensure students stay connected and provide opportunities for students to share, interact, problem-solve and learn together. These opportunities will help to diminish students' isolation and loneliness and increase the magnitude of the impact of learning for students who are learning at home (as well as those who are attending school in person).

Practices

The final aspect in understanding impact relates to practices that are likely to enhance student learning. Some of the students most affected are those who are overly dependent on the teacher to tell them what to do, stand over them while they're doing it, and make

decisions about what to do next. These students have low self-regulation, and teachers need to teach metacognitive skills while providing a release of responsibility that will allow students to become independent learners. It is through learning that students progress to achievement.

Principals can work with teachers in figuring out how to continue to utilize high-probability practices regardless of constraints posed by the pandemic. For example, the jigsaw method has an effect size of 1.20 (and we have witnessed the successful use of the jigsaw strategy in online learning environments) (Hattie, 2019). There are many high-probability practices that can be accomplished in remote learning situations. If teachers are delivering instruction face-to-face, remotely or using a combination of the two, principals can work with teachers to help figure out how to utilize the strategies that are most likely to impact student learning and increase students' ability to regulate their learning.

An effective leader works with teachers in their school to evaluate collective impact (d=0.91). We described four considerations related to understanding impact. These included the validity of the impact, the equitability of the impact, the magnitude of the impact, and the practices that are most related to student learning. It is important for principals to continue to cultivate an efficacy mindset amongst their faculty (and within themselves) – more so today than ever before!

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