Center for Leadership & Educational Equity

Overview of Research on How Learning Communities and Facilitative Leadership Foster Outcomes for Educators, Students, and Schools

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The CLEE community supports educators as they transform their own practices and their schools to achieve educational equity. Our core approaches — including communities of practice and facilitative leadership — are based on decades of research that connects schoolwide professional communities to improvements in pedagogy, school culture, and high and equitable student learning. For example, Kruse and Louis (1993) studied six urban schools and found that how adults worked and learned together was an important driver of improvements in teacher practice and student learning. Similarly, researchers overseeing the School Restructuring Study of 24 elementary, middle, and high schools nationwide found that schoolwide professional community correlated both with authentic pedagogy and student performance (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Furthermore, Newmann (1994) demonstrated how teacher collaboration, reflection, and a willingness to deprivatize practice were able to improve teacher practice and student learning, while, Bryk and Schneider (2002) found an important connection between the levels of trust in schools and teacher capacity to enact pedagogical reforms and increased student learning. A six-year longitudinal study of the Chicago Public Schools established that school-based professional community and teachers' capacity for professional learning were highly associated with improvements in classroom instruction and student learning (Bryk et al., 2010).

Overall, the robust base of research suggests that **improvements in teaching practice that result in increased student learning are connected to teacher communities that are collaborative, reflective, and focused on teacher practice and student learning** (Bryk et al., 2012; Carroll et al., 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012; Stoll & Louis, 2007).

CLEE promotes the improvement of collaborative, reflective adult learning in many forms and contexts, including common structures like grade level, content and/or school improvement teams, as well as larger efforts like communities of practice and improvement networks. In all these contexts, structured conversations through the use of protocols like those found in this Resource Book, combined with skilled facilitation, build and sustain the mindsets and skillsets needed to engage in reflection, collaboration and the challenging conversations that matter most - those focused on equity, race, power, etc. (Allen & Blythe, 2004; Blythe et al., 2007; Breidenstein et al., 2012; Colton & Langer, 2005; Easton, 2009; Hatch & Seidel, 1997; Hudson, 2003; Ippolito, 2013; McDonald et al., 2007).

Notably, the power of learning communities has been documented in a number of studies, the first of which were conducted by Naves, Dunne, Honts and Lewis (Dunne & Honts, 1998; Dunne et al., 2000). Building on these foundational studies, various scholars have the work

of intentional learning communities at the classroom, school, and district levels (Baskerville & Goldblatt, 2009; Cox, 2010; Curry, 2008; Gibbs & Angelides, 2008; Hudson, 2005; Law, 2005; Nave, 2000; Silva, 2005; Vo & Nguyen, 2010). Others have shown how these approaches have been used in teacher preparation programs (Franzak, 2002; Norman et al., 2005; Windschitl et al., 2011), in professional development settings (Braun et al, 2017; Ippolito, 2013; Ippolito & Pomerantz, 2013), with university faculty (Ballock, 2009; Bernacchio et al., 2007; Bisplinghoff, 2005), and with school leaders (Braun et al., 2013; Fahey, 2011, 2012).

Many new areas of study are emerging since the foundational research cited here. For example, scholars and practitioners aim to understand the variables that support and inhibit effective learning communities, including leadership practices and virtual modes of learning. CLEE has added to the research base described above by investigating and defining the facilitative leadership practices that contribute to increasing both educator instructional practices and equitable outcomes for youth (Braun et al., 2017; 2021). CLEE's research aims to extend the research base by examining how the following practices impact educator and student learning:

- the use of key components of continuous improvement models, including working together collaboratively, using data, and implementing research-based practices to improve the instructional core (Bryk, 2015; Bryk et al., 2015);
- an unrelenting focus on equitable outcomes;
- CLEE's Core Leadership Practices based on decades of leadership development research (Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004); and
- a grounding in adult developmental theory (Kegan & Lahey, 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

CLEE's studies have found that when leaders and educators form learning communities that use facilitative leadership practices (which CLEE calls the Core Leadership Practices) to lead cycles of improvement, educators are empowered to see and understand systemic inequities, their own assumptions, and others' beliefs. This depth is key to moving past the common model of school improvement that stops short of evolving or transforming practices (Fahey et al, 2019). CLEE's research has shown implementation of such practices **is correlated with statistically significant growth in learning for students, especially those who have been marginalized.**

There is still much work to be done documenting and designing powerful adult collaborative learning communities focused on improving teaching, reimagining schools and achieving equitable student learning. Watch for ways to be involved in this effort at www.clee.org. Note: Additional research related to adult collaboration and learning, including intentional learning communities and other approaches, can be found on the archived SRI web site at: schoolreforminitiative.org/research/ and at https://clee.org/impact.

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