

Public Abstract

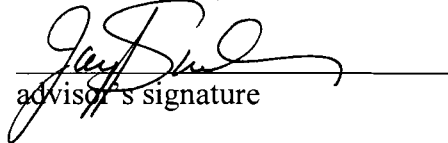
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Ph.D.

Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

Teacher collaboration and school reform: Distributing leadership through the use of professional learning teams

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advisor's signature

This dissertation reports the findings of a study of two professional learning teams of teachers at one Midwestern secondary school implementing a hybrid school improvement process incorporating elements of several models of comprehensive school reform. A case-study approach was used to study the role of organizational conditions on teacher team performance, the emergence and enactment of leadership within the teams, and the quality of team outcomes. Qualitative methods, such as the analysis of observations and interviews, were used to generate findings that reveal many details of collaboration in the two teams.

Findings touch upon many aspects of teacher collaboration. Organizational factors such as performance alignment and school governance structures interact with the critical dimension of time to both limit and intensify teachers' work in teams. Patterns of talk interacted with teachers' perceptions of team purpose and autonomy to shape collaboration. Conversational routines were established that are improvisational and negotiated in character, yet exert a powerful shaping force on team performance. Leadership within teams is found to be a product of group influence on one another. This process is called *emergent reciprocal influence*. These factors, dimensions, patterns, and routines make up collaborative activity within teacher teams. Ultimately, the study concludes that collaboration potentially serves can be both a positive and a negative for individual teachers. Each teacher's personal professional freedom can become limited, yet each can also benefit from learning from other colleagues. These findings are related to broader context of historical trends in business, education, and politics.