

Teachers' Professional Community in Restructuring Schools

The ways in which teachers interact with each other matters greatly to the learning results they collectively achieve for students in their school. An emerging research base amplifies this point in a number of recent studies. One significant and well-designed study identifies important aspects of professional community in schools. Researchers Karen Seashore Louis, Helen Marks, and Sharon Kruse (1996) surfaced five elements that contributed to across the board gains in student achievement in the twenty-four schools they studied.

The elements are:

Shared norms and values – these establish reciprocal expectations for community members about what is important, providing a sense of moral authority and moral responsibility for making a difference in the lives of students.

Collective focus on student learning – professional communities focus on student learning as the end and teaching as the means. Shared focus organizes the power of cumulative effect within and across grade levels, departments, and teams.

Collaboration – teachers in the high performing schools studied operated with expanded professional identities that included both personal classroom practice and the shared meaning making resulting from collaborative activities with colleagues.

Deprivatized practice – when teaching practice goes public, teachers visit one another's classrooms to observe lessons and materials, to mentor, and to solve problems in the living laboratory of instructional space.

Reflective dialogue – the work of professional communities in schools is a melding of the private and the public and of autonomy and interdependence. Reflective dialogue is a key leavening agent in this process. To dialogue means developing shared understandings among colleagues about important issues and concerns.

For more information see;

Louis, K.S., Marks, H.M., & Kruse, S. (1996). Teachers' professional community in restructuring schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 33 (4), 757-798.