1 Educators' Beliefs Matter

A Tale of Two School Improvement Teams With Very Different Outlooks

Recently, we were asked by a senior administrator to work with school improvement teams at two of their low-performing high schools. The student demographics at the first school were described by the principal as "high level of poverty, a large number of students in applied level (workplace bound) courses with large gaps in their learning, home-environment issues, large number of students on Individual Education Plans (about 33%), many with mild intellectual disabilities (MID), a transient population, substance abuse, and mental health issues." In fact, 31.6 percent of the students in this high school were receiving special education services, a much higher percentage than the state average of 14.9 percent. The student demographics at the second school were also described by the administrator there as "high poverty and transient population with a large number of students whose first language is not English." Thirty-seven percent of the students came from low-income homes, 20.7 percent were receiving special education services, and the percentage of students whose first language was not English was 47.9 percent—significantly higher than the state average of 23.9 percent.

While both high schools experienced similar challenges and concerns, there was a stark contrast between the beliefs held by the educators in the two schools and these beliefs played out in their practice. During

the visit at the first school, a team of teachers presented a plan they had drafted to address the literacy needs of the students in their school and requested feedback. Driving the team's work were the following three essential questions:

1. How can we improve literacy school-wide?
2. How can we increase and maintain an increase in student achievement?
3. How can we assist previously eligible students and special education students to increase their success on standardized tests?

In the plan, the team had listed a number of strategies including "increase whole school awareness of literacy and work together to address the problem" and "build upon students' strengths while also focusing on areas for growth." The plan went on to list actionable steps to take and timelines for doing so, and laid out roles and responsibilities for individuals involved. The conversation around the table was very positive, and teachers talked about things they were learning about and identified a few evidence-based strategies they agreed to try in their own classrooms. They also talked about an upcoming professional development day and began to identify strategies to model for the entire faculty.

Upon entering the meeting room at the second high school, the tone seemed immediately different from what we had experienced at the first school. The body language (crossed arms) and facial expressions (upset/angry) of the teachers in the room seemed to indicate that they were feeling strained and the room was full of tension. They too had considered students' learning needs and identified *basic skill development* as the most pressing of these needs along with student engagement. The team spent a lot of time explaining to us just how challenging the circumstances were at this school, noting that parents were not supportive and that students were coming to school "less and less able to manage themselves." At one point, a teacher said, "I feel ill-equipped to teach many of the students in my class" and went on to say that "everyone in my department is overwhelmed with work." When we tried to nudge the conversation to help the team identify some manageable steps they might take to improve student learning, the principal expressed the "hope to emphasize that this is not more work" and a teacher chimed

in by agreeing that "teachers are much more motivated to do something that will make their day easier rather than an add-on; if there is something that can make a teacher's job easier, people will be on board." Finally, the meeting ended with one of the teachers saying, "None of this really matters because there isn't much we can do that is going to make a difference for *these* kids."

Teachers' theories about the relationship between students' race, class, first language, and resulting achievement affect the content and skills teachers choose to teach, their beliefs about students' ability to learn, as well as their beliefs about what they can do to increase student performance (Evans, 2009). In teachers' analysis of their collective capabilities to meet the needs of all students, including those who are disadvantaged, if teachers view this as an unattainable goal, their individual and collective efficacy will be diminished.

> Bandura (2000) noted that "the higher the perceived collective efficacy, the higher the groups' motivational investments in their undertakings, the stronger their staying power in the face of impediments and setbacks, and the greater their performance accomplishments" (p. 78).

Collective Efficacy Beliefs

Collective teacher efficacy is a shared *belief* in a team's combined ability to positively impact student outcomes. It is the "collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities" (Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004, p. 190). The team at the first high school had a sense of collective efficacy, which was a key factor in motivating *their* productive and collaborative efforts. They responded to difficult challenges with the determination and collective resolve to tackle them head on. The teachers believed that together they could make a difference and they made connections between their joint efforts and the small incremental increases they were realizing in relation to student success.

Collective teacher efficacy is a shared *belief* in a team's combined ability to positively impact student outcomes.

The team at the second school responded to similar issues with resignation and excuses as to why they *couldn't* succeed. They attributed the reasons for their lack of success to external causes. As a result of their lack of collective efficacy, they convinced themselves that their efforts did not matter and therefore, they were not motivated to take action. If the efficacy beliefs of the teachers at this school are not strengthened

Readers will find additional information about the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student results in Appendix A.

and attributions for success and/or failure are not shifted from external to internal causes, the consequences for the students will remain dire. Issues of inequity will remain unaddressed.

We believe that every educator wants every student to experience academic success. We also believe that educators want to provide students with safe and rich learning environments where every student, regardless of their circumstances at home, English-language proficiency, race, or ethnicity, receives the support they require in order to be successful. Sometimes, however, a diminished sense of efficacy gets in the way of realizing success for all. When educators do not believe they have what it takes to overcome the challenges posed by students' personal or social circumstances, they set lower goals and expend less effort, and often avoidance occurs as a result. Efficacy beliefs influence how individuals and teams "feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave" (Bandura, 1993). When efficacy is lacking, teams are less likely to take risks and lack a willingness to try different approaches. They are less likely to implement evidence-based strategies and less receptive to change. The dilemma, of course, is that as a lack of efficacy results in the avoidance of educator risk-taking and implementation of improvement efforts, student trajectories will remain unchanged. Groups of students who require interventions needed to shift trajectories upward will be the ones to suffer the consequences.

When examining the role of collective efficacy in closing student achievement gaps, Goddard et al. (2017) found that collective efficacy beliefs were important to educational equity and achievement. The researchers found that collective efficacy was associated with a 50 percent reduction in the academic disadvantage experienced by minority students. In the schools with high efficacy, stories were shared in which educators refused to accept excuses for low performance.

Efficacy Beliefs Drive Receptiveness to Change

As noted earlier, when efficacy *is* well established, teams are more likely to step outside their comfort zones and figure out how to make evidence-based strategies work in their environments, given their unique circumstances and diverse student populations (Donohoo & Katz, 2020). In other words, efficacy beliefs are a precursor to improved student outcomes because efficacy drives educators' receptiveness to change.

Figure 1.1 Receptiveness to Change During Stages of Implementation Matrix

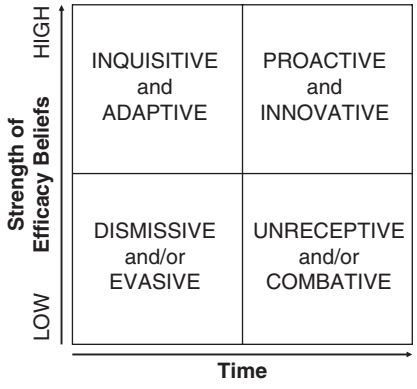
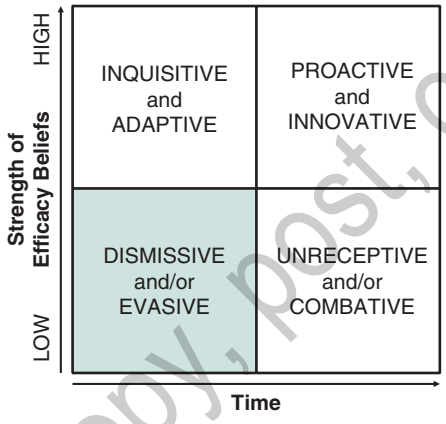


Figure 1.2 Low Efficacy/Beginning Stage of Implementation



The relationship between efficacy beliefs and receptiveness to change is demonstrated in the matrix shown in Figure 1.1. On the left side, efficacy beliefs range from low to high. Time is represented along the bottom. When change is first introduced in a school, if efficacy beliefs are low (Figure 1.2), teachers are likely to be dismissive and/or evasive, adopting a "this too shall pass" attitude. Rather than taking action, they will wait it out—hoping for a change in administration. These are the teachers who are conveniently absent from professional learning and find excuses to not attend meetings related to the proposed change. If efficacy beliefs are high (Figure 1.3), however, teachers are inquisitive when hearing about proposed changes. Just like the teachers in the first high school, highly efficacious teams pose questions, explore possibilities, and are open to adapting their current practice. They want to learn more.

Figure 1.3 High Efficacy/Beginning Stage of Implementation

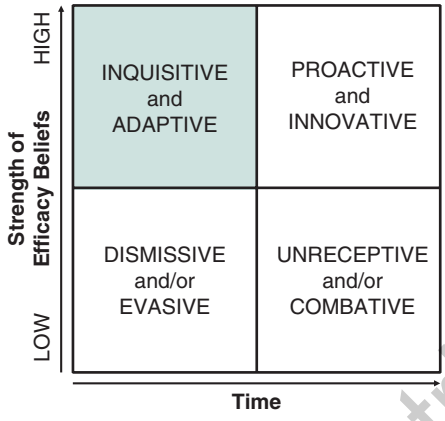
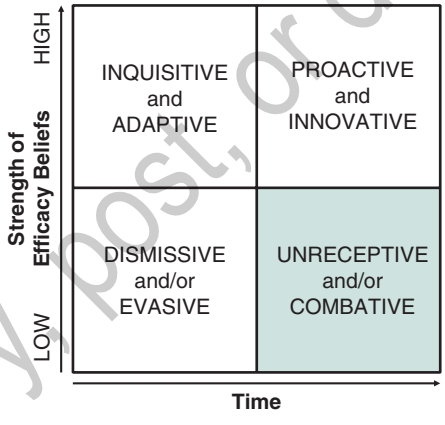


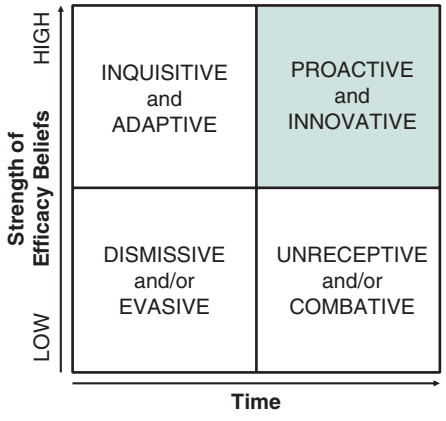
Figure 1.4 Low Efficacy/Later Stage of Implementation



Over time, as expectations for implementation and accountability pressures increase, if efficacy is low (Figure 1.4), teachers will become unreceptive and perhaps even combative. These are the teachers who refuse to try anything new in their classrooms—often because they believe the tasks they are being asked to perform are harder than they actually are. Sometimes, a diminished sense of efficacy manifests itself in a heavy reliance on current practice, and teams protect the status quo rather than express a willingness to inquire into the impact of their practices.

If efficacy is high (Figure 1.5), however, educators are ready to take on change—even before it happens. Teams take control and figure out ways to work things out. Over time, they successfully cope with and support the changes initiated. They become innovative. We do not want to give readers the impression here, however, that our use

Figure 1.5 High Efficacy/Later Stage of Implementation



of the term *innovative* suggests that we believe that educators need to invent any new ways of improving schools. That is not the case. We are on fairly solid ground when it comes to the *what* of school improvement. There is a plethora of research about what works in schools that dates back many decades. What we mean by innovative (represented in the top-right quadrant of the matrix) is the deep implementation of evidence-based strategies that are purposefully selected given the unique context of different schools and classrooms. Highly efficacious teams are innovative in the sense that they figure out how to realize the promises of evidence-based, improvement-oriented interventions—regardless of their unique environments and student populations (Donohoo & Katz, 2020). As Tschannen-Moran and Barr (2004) put it, "Teachers in schools with high collective efficacy do not accept low student achievement as an inevitable by-product of low socioeconomic status, lack of ability, or family background. They roll up their sleeves and get the job done" (p. 192).

We developed this matrix to illustrate how receptiveness to change is highly influenced by efficacy beliefs. Without change, there can't be improvement. Without improvement, equity in education will not be achieved. Without a firmly established belief in efficacy, it is unlikely that change resulting in improvement will occur.

Readers probably made connections to their own experiences based on the contrasting shared beliefs held by the teachers at the two high schools in the story

Robinson (2018) made a deliberate distinction between the terms *change* and *improvement* and noted that with this distinction "there is likely to be more critical and more thoughtful debate before large-scale implementation" (p. 3).

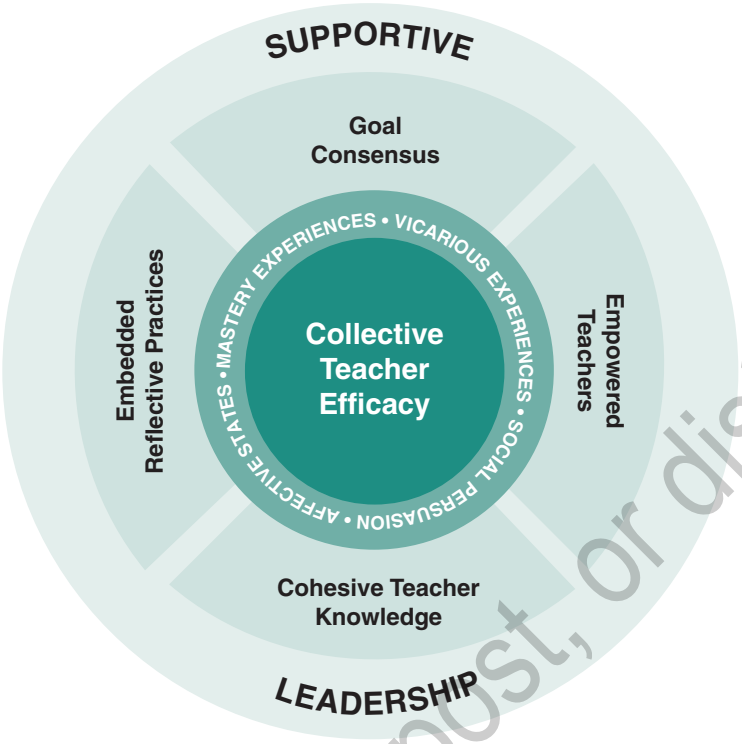
recounted at the beginning of this chapter. Whether readers' current realities are reflective of the first high school or the second, it would be important to determine conditions in schools that lead to the formation of a strong sense of collective efficacy. What was it that contributed to teachers' sense of collective efficacy in the first school? What shared experiences did the efficacious team of high school teachers have in the past? What was in place in the first high school that helped to foster teachers' willingness to collaborate, inquire, adapt, and innovate? It would also be important to consider what undermines efficacy. What caused the teachers in the second school to give up?

The Formation of Efficacy Beliefs

Individual and collective efficacy beliefs are formed based on information processed from past experiences (Bandura, 1986) as well as contextual factors that contribute to teachers' perceptions about their current realities. Efficacy beliefs are future oriented (Bandura, 1986). They are rooted in individuals' and teams' "there and then" experiences (what occurred in the past) and "here and now" experiences (what is happening in the current environment). In the section that follows, sources from past experiences that become efficacy-shaping information will be shared. In addition, five enabling conditions for collective teacher efficacy are identified and explained.

When forming judgments about their future capabilities, teams draw on previous experiences. Bandura (1993) noted that efficacy beliefs evolve based on four types of past experiences: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states (Figure 1.6). Results from past performances are the primary source of efficacy-shaping information for individuals and teams. Previous firsthand experiences provide teams with authentic evidence of whether or not they have what it takes to succeed (Bandura, 1993). When teams meet with success (mastery experiences), they come to expect that they can repeat successful performances. "Success raises mastery expectations" (Bandura, 1977, p. 195). Efficacy and achievement alternate as causes and effects. As a sense of efficacy results in increased performance, better performance outcomes further strengthen collective efficacy, which results in additional increases in performance. On the other hand, when teams do not succeed, repeated failure becomes a source of diminishing efficacy, especially when experienced early on (Bandura, 1977).

Figure 1.6 A Model for Leading Collective Teacher Efficacy: Sources of Efficacy Beliefs



Source: Based on research conducted by Bandura (1977).

In schools, an indicator of educators' previous success would include students' prior academic achievement. The greater the increase in students' achievement, the more successful experience a faculty has to draw upon as a basis for developing collective efficacy. This is what Denise Cleary (acting superintendent) in Linden Public Schools knew when she asked Derek Kondratowicz, the district data and assessment supervisor, to share data that showed significant improvement in academic achievement in a number of grade levels with teachers during an after-school meeting. The data at Linden Public Schools showed a significant increase in achievement in many grade levels, and it also demonstrated that Grade 5 students outperformed the state in English Language Arts for the first time. After 3 years of intense work, Denise knew it would be empowering for teams to see how their efforts paid off and capitalized on the opportunity to use mastery experiences to further enhance collective efficacy in the district. Readers will learn more about the journey to success in Linden Public Schools in Chapter 3.

Knowing that drawing upon previous success in raising student achievement is one of the most effective ways to develop collective efficacy might be disheartening for some teams, especially in cases where students' prior academic achievement has remained low. If students' academic achievement has not yet increased, what are other sources that can be drawn upon to shape a team's future beliefs about what they are capable of accomplishing? Vicarious experiences also have incredible power in harnessing collective efficacy. Collective efficacy increases when teams learn that others, faced with similar challenges, met with success (Bandura, 1986). This was Principal D'Les Gonzales Herron's experience in San Antonio during the Opening Classroom Doors initiative. While participating in the leadership network of the 20-school cohort, she had the opportunity to visit, collect data, and make improvement suggestions during Instructional Rounds in her colleagues' schools. D'Les's school, Briscoe Elementary, didn't host visitors until several years into the initiative but that didn't mean that D'Les wasn't learning and making improvements. By the time Briscoe hosted the Opening Classroom Doors visit, the staff were well on their way to transforming their school. Vicarious experiences in other schools and other classrooms impacted their work. The Briscoe Elementary team's efficacy was enhanced early on because they saw other teachers in the district succeeding under similar circumstances. Readers will learn more about Briscoe Elementary's story in Chapter 4.

"Seeing people similar to oneself succeed by perseverant effort raises observers' beliefs about their own abilities" (Bandura, 1998, p. 54).

Social persuasion is the third source of efficacy-shaping information. This happens when teams are convinced to take risks and told that they have what it takes to accomplish their goals. Social persuasion is a form of influence that is exercised when a credible and trustworthy colleague convinces a group that they constitute an effective team. Bandura (1998) noted that "effective efficacy builders do more than convey positive appraisals. They structure situations for others in ways that bring success and avoid placing them, prematurely, in situations where they are likely to fail" (p. 54). Ken Wallace, superintendent at Maine Township High School District in Illinois, knew this as he built a leadership team of social persuaders. Ken noted that building a team of persuaders "who agreed something needed to change allowed for the message to be filtered to all educators from multiple levels." With a rapidly changing

shift in demographics (increased enrollment of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds), it was important to help teams in Maine Township see themselves as capable of meeting the learning needs of all students. Readers will learn more about Maine Township's success in overcoming challenges, including restricted access to enriched programs, in Chapter 2.

The final source of efficacy-shaping information that comes from past experiences is what Bandura (1998) called affective states. Affective states refers to the intensity in which individuals and teams experience feelings as they step outside their comfort zones. Risk can invoke worry, concern, anxiety, and insecurity to name a few negative feelings that teams might experience. On the other hand, when teams experience positive feelings associated with the work of school improvement, it results in an increased sense of collective efficacy. Positive feelings include optimism, hope, and pride. Readers will learn how Garth Larson, former principal at Butte des Morts Elementary School, instilled a sense of optimism, hope, and pride in the staff in order to develop collective teacher efficacy in Chapter 5.

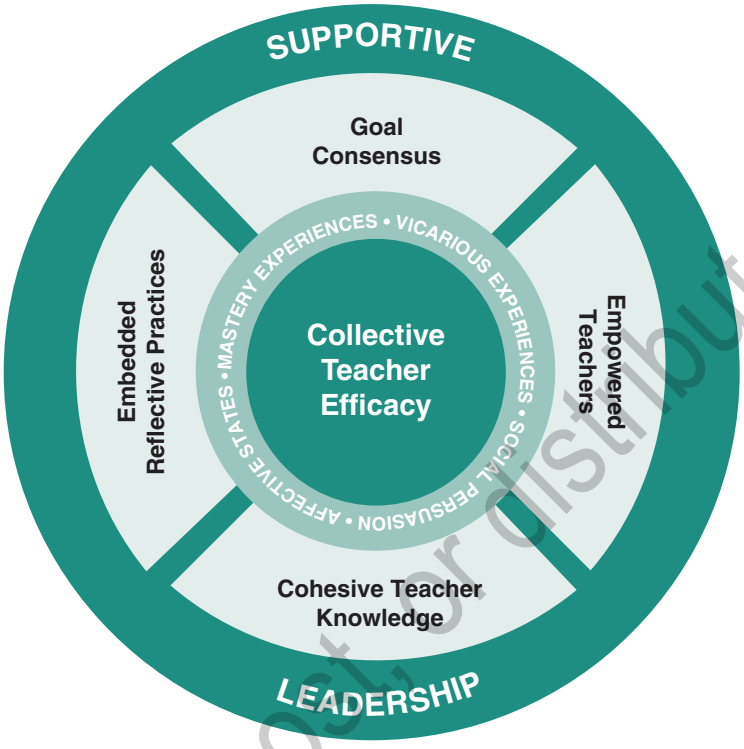
"Positive mood enhances a sense of efficacy" (Bandura, 1998, p. 54).

Five Enabling Conditions for Collective Teacher Efficacy

In addition to Bandura's (1998) sources of efficacy that are based on past experiences, research studies (Adams & Forsyth, 2006; Ross et al., 2004) also demonstrated the theoretical relevance of *contextual factors* (here and now factors) as additional and significant efficacy-shaping sources in schools. As noted earlier, each chapter of this book highlights one of the enabling conditions (Figure 1.7) that have been identified through research as malleable, contextual antecedents of collective teacher efficacy. While enabling conditions do not *cause* things to happen, they increase the likelihood that things will turn out as expected. These enabling conditions are Goal Consensus,

Adams and Forsyth (2006) differentiated between two types of sources of collective efficacy. The criterion they used to differentiate was in relation to the "proximity of occurrence to present teaching realities by which efficacy sources exist" (p. 630). They called for a need to classify mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states as "remote" sources because "they occurred at some time in the past" (p. 630) and present contextual conditions as "proximate" sources because they "have a day in and day out influence on the teaching tasks" (p. 630).

Figure 1.7 A Model for Leading Collective Teacher Efficacy



In Jenni's earlier book, *Collective Efficacy: How Educators' Beliefs Impact Student Learning* (2017), Jenni identified six enabling conditions for collective efficacy. Recently, Jenni, along with O'Leary and Hattie (2020), conducted a study to produce a questionnaire to measure the enabling conditions for collective teacher efficacy. The design and validation of the scale included statistical techniques (exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis) to determine composite reliability of the enabling conditions. Based on this analysis (from both a technical and theoretical perspective), the Enabling Conditions for Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale (EC-CTES) contained the following five subscales: Goal Consensus, Empowered Teachers, Cohesive Teacher Knowledge, Empowered Teachers, Cohesive Teacher Knowledge, Embedded Reflective Practices, and Supportive Leadership (Donohoo, O'Leary, & Hattie, 2020).

Goal Consensus

Goal setting is part of a cycle of evidence-based assessment, analysis, and determination of next steps (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). There is a strong relationship between goal consensus and collective teacher efficacy (Kurz & Knight, 2003; Ross et al., 2004). In schools with high levels of understanding and consensus around goals, school-wide improvement goals are clear, specific, and realistic. Improvement goals are

established and understood by all teaching staff, and there is a process in place for teachers to collaborate when setting goals for improvement. Readers will learn how superintendent Ken Wallace and his team at Maine Township built consensus around goals in Chapter 2.

Empowered Teachers

When the conditions are set for teachers to come together to determine solutions to challenges of practices and hierarchy is flattened, it helps foster a sense of collective efficacy. Empowering teachers (promoting teacher leadership and influence within the school) has been deemed important, as past research has identified the strong and positive relationship between teacher influence (Goddard, 2002; Ross et al., 2004), teacher leadership (Derrington & Angelle, 2013), and collective teacher efficacy. In Chapter 3, readers will learn how Linden Public Schools in New Jersey strengthened collective efficacy and ultimately increased student achievement by empowering teachers.

Embedded Reflective Practices, and Supportive Leadership. It isn't our intention to inundate readers with the statistical details of the study. We did feel it was important, however, to explain the reason for the revisions to the original list of enabling conditions that was published in 2017. Additional information regarding the design and validation of the EC-CTES can be found in Appendix B and at http://teacher-efficacy.com/our_services/enabling-conditions/.

Ross and colleagues' (2004) research identified that goal setting had a stronger effect on collective teacher efficacy than prior student achievement.

In 2002, Goddard found that an increase of one standard deviation in collective teacher efficacy was associated with a 0.41 standard deviation increase in teacher influence. Where teachers had the opportunity to influence important, instructionally relevant school decisions, they also tended to have stronger beliefs in the combined ability of the faculty to positively impact student achievement.

Cohesive Teacher Knowledge

Cohesion is defined as the degree to which teachers agree with each other about what constitutes effective assessment and instructional practices. Ross et al. (2004) found the more cohesive the faculty, the more likely they were to be influenced by social persuasion. The researchers believed the reason for this was because the more cohesive the staff, the more likely they would be aware of each other's concerns. The awareness of concerns was then useful in building persuasive arguments about the important role that individuals contributed to the team. Ross et al. (2004) further pointed out that the greater the cohesion, the more opportunities teachers had to experience successful collaboration, and the "social

Opening Classroom Doors is a process similar to Instructional Rounds in Education (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009) but modified for local contextual needs and enhanced with new approaches from data team and coaching traditions.

processes that generated peer support were likely to reduce the effects of negative emotions on collective efficacy beliefs" (p. 167). Readers will learn how D'Les Gonzales Herron, former principal at Briscoe Elementary, helped build cohesive teacher knowledge through the process of Opening Classroom Doors in Chapter 4.

Embedded Reflective Practices

Embedded reflective practices are processes by which teams work together to examine sources of student evidence to help inform their work. "When instructional improvement efforts result in improved student outcomes that are validated through sources of student learning data, educators' collective efficacy is strengthened. Evidence of collective impact, in turn, reinforces proactive collective behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and motivations" (Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018, p. 42). Embedded reflection in light of evidence helps to uncover cause-and-effect relationships (quality teaching causes student learning) and would therefore highlight firsthand mastery experiences and vicarious experiences for teacher teams. Teachers come to realize the positive results of their own efforts, others' efforts, and their combined efforts through processes that enable embedded reflective practices. Embedded reflective practices are at the heart of teachers' collaborative work. Teachers become empowered, build consensus on goals, and develop greater cohesion when reflection in light of student evidence is embedded in their common practices. Readers will learn about strategies and tools to embed reflective practice in Chapter 5.

Supportive Leadership

Supportive leadership centers upon the school leadership's approach to buffering teachers from distractions and the recognition of individual and team accomplishments. It goes beyond that, however, in the sense that leaders play an important role in nurturing the conditions for the other enabling conditions to be realized as well. School leaders establish the processes and procedures that help to *empower teachers* and ensure that teachers are regularly *reflecting* on their practice in light of evidence. They create the conditions to foster collaboration, increase

teachers' knowledge of each other's work, and build greater *cohesion* amongst their staff. They can also establish a process for gaining *consensus on school goals*. Readers will learn more about the role of supportive leadership in developing collective teacher efficacy in Chapter 6.

What is important to note is that these five enabling conditions are malleable—they can be molded, modified, and changed. They are within a leader's scope of influence. There are other contextual factors that influence collective teacher efficacy that are out of the leader's and faculty's control. Bandura (1993) and Hoy, Smith, and Sweetland (2003) demonstrated that students' socioeconomic status influenced collective teacher efficacy. We are not here to argue that socioeconomic status doesn't matter. Hattie's (2019) Visible Learning® research synthesis, the largest research database that examines factors that influence student achievement, demonstrates that socioeconomic status has an effect size of 0.52. While low socioeconomic status is likely to negatively influence student achievement, collective teacher efficacy is more powerful, with an effect size of 1.39 (Hattie, 2019). Bandura (1993) demonstrated that the effect of collective teacher efficacy on student achievement was stronger than the link between socioeconomic status and student achievement. Goddard et al. (2017) demonstrated that collective efficacy closes achievement gaps. What is most important is that educators realize they hold the power to address issues of inequity when they intentionally build collective efficacy.

Goddard, Goddard, Kim, and Miller (2015) examined the relationships among leadership, teacher collaboration, collective efficacy, and student achievement and found that the more robust the sense of collective efficacy, "the greater their levels of student achievement, even after controlling for school and student background characteristics and prior levels of student achievement" (p. 525).

An effect size emphasizes the difference in magnitude of different factors for the purpose of comparison. An effect size of 0 reveals that the influence had no effect on student achievement. The larger the effect size, the more powerful the influence. Hattie (2009) suggested that an effect size of 0.20 is relatively small, an effect size of 0.40 is medium, and an effect size of 0.60 is large.

Sandoval, Challoo, and Kupczynski (2011) examined the relationship between collective teacher efficacy and student achievement at economically disadvantaged middle school campuses and found that the efficacious campuses could impact student achievement through their belief in their colleagues' ability to impact student achievement regardless of the students' background and socioeconomic status.

Conclusion

Powerful stories provide inspiration as well as information to educators seeking to build collective efficacy in their own schools.

In this chapter, we compared and contrasted a team who lacked collective efficacy with a team whose efficacy was firmly established and considered the consequences of both. We explored how efficacy beliefs drive receptiveness to change. We also demonstrated how a team's future-oriented efficacy beliefs are influenced based on both *past experiences* and *current contextual factors*. In the chapters that follow, we share stories from leaders in education who have been successful in increasing student achievement and addressed issues of inequity by enabling the conditions in which collective efficacy is enhanced. These powerful stories provide inspiration as well as information to educators seeking to build collective efficacy in their own schools.