

### #7 STIMULATING COLLECTIVE SELF-EFFICACY

*Loes van Wessum and Rieneke Pruis, 2023*

#### # Practical questions for which this card offers SUGGESTIONS:

- How do I stimulate teachers to bring out the best of themselves?
- How do I stimulate teachers to bring out the best of their students?
- How do I stimulate teachers to persist in teaching the most vulnerable students?

#### Why is it important to promote collective self-efficacy?

Collective self-efficacy is the most important factor influencing student learning. According to research it outranks every other factor including socioeconomic status, prior achievement, home and parental environment. It is the feeling: "Yes, we can". Collective efficacy is the shared beliefs of teachers that collaboratively they can achieve the desired goals. When teachers have a high degree of collective efficacy, they display a positive attitude to professional development and are more likely to try new, evidence-based teaching approaches, even when the going gets tough. The strength of their convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will try to even cope with given situations and they convey high but realistic expectations of students. A team with a high degree of collective self-efficacy stimulate students' self-concepts, which helps setting their high expectations and to show positive behaviour. They support student autonomy in solving problems. They trust their students, the parents, each other and the school principal, they have a shared responsibility for the learning of all students. Teachers, students, parents and school leaders invest in maintaining good relationships with each other.

#### What is needed to develop collective self-efficacy?

The leader who helps develop focused collaborative capacity will make the greatest contribution to student learning. School leaders can support teachers' collective efficacy by stimulating their professional growth. They can offer different learning opportunities and create an environment in which teachers can thrive.

School leaders can stimulate teachers to view student failure as an incentive for greater teacher effort. They can ask them to pay attention to the more vulnerable pupils for a while and use instructional strategies usually reserved for the pupils of which they have higher expectations. This way, teachers may discover that their most vulnerable students can learn more than the teacher believed. They understand the importance and impact of teachers' beliefs and expectations regarding the students' abilities and learning results. This can also bring feelings of professional shame, believing they failed their students before. In the context of achieving collective efficacy, it is important to stimulate teachers to share these feelings with other teachers and the school leader.

School leaders can develop a safe learning environment, providing mutual respect and understanding, empathy and support. A culture of trust, collective self-efficacy and experiencing success are reciprocally enhancing each other. Teachers who together dare to experiment with new instructional strategies and investigate its effects, notice that the students' results improve. This experience of success increases their collective self-efficacy, they experience that they matter – even for the most vulnerable children.

## Step 1) Setting goals together

What goals do we want to achieve with our students? When teachers actively participate in setting goals, they are more likely to pay attention to them and to commit to them. By setting clear goals, you bring focus. It gives direction to action. Everyone can determine where students are now and where they want them to be. It supports inquiry-based teaching. How do we contribute achieving the goals? Setting goals increases learning results, collective efficacy and job satisfaction.

## Step 2) Encourage meaningful professional growth

Collective self-efficacy is nourished by experiences of success. If teachers experience that they can contribute successfully to the learning of all students it will boost their efficacy. It's important to reflect on these mastery experiences: what knowledge, skills, views and beliefs helped them achieve the goals? What collective knowledge, skills, views and beliefs can contribute to achieve the goals? Collaboration between teachers promotes this reflection and offers emotional support.

Professional learning is not limited to the occasional course or training, but is a continuous informal process. Teachers learn from their teaching processes and while investigating their impact on the learning of their students. Experimenting with new instructional strategies can be difficult and challenging, but it contributes to the teachers' professional development. In the context of developing collective self-efficacy, collaboration between teachers and sharing their successes offers the opportunity to learn with and from each other. It contributes to the development of collective wisdom. By working together, teachers can also learn from colleagues who are more adept or experienced in specific instructional strategies.

## Step 3) Stimulate collaboration

Ensure a safe learning environment for collaboration. Teachers mainly learn from their peers. Hence, collaboration is a powerful tool for professional learning and development. Collective self-efficacy can only develop collaboratively within a psychologically safe environment. Teachers can only show their vulnerability

if they know each other well and feel safe to do so, and when they experience good will for their students and each other.

Collective efficacy develops as knowledge is shared and teachers learn from the experiences their colleagues have had. As a school leader, you can facilitate collaboration by making time for this and linking teachers together.

Teachers can also learn by collaborating with colleagues from other schools. Learning in networks or visiting other schools can give teachers new notions they can share with colleagues in their own school.

Collaboration can also focus on jointly researching and designing lessons – for example, in a professional learning community. By interpreting student results and teachers' interventions together, teachers learn to understand their students' learning processes and the ways in which they can enhance them. Through collaborative teacher inquiry, teachers get to know each other better and learn how to build on each other's skills. This makes it easier to feel a shared responsibility for achieving the goals for all students. It also becomes easier to support one another and to ask for help when things go wrong.

Teachers must also learn to work together. They need to develop social sensitivity. This involves, for example, learning to listen to others and being empathetic.

## Step 4) Provide individual support

Teachers are more likely to try new instructional strategies if they feel supported by their school leader and the team. You can show that making mistakes is an indispensable part of the learning process. Learning is often accompanied by emotions and excitement. It helps teachers if they know they are entitled to their emotions and feelings. Teachers feel supported when they know they can turn to you with their concerns and if you know how they are doing and what concerns them. Treat them how you would like them to treat their students.

