

# researchsnapshot



## Creating Cultures for Collaborative Inquiry: New Challenges for School Leaders

**Source of Research:** Emihovich, C., & Battaglia, C. (2000). *International Journal of Leadership in Education*. 3(3), 225-238. Taylor and Francis Ltd.

### What is this research about?

Based on the belief that teachers are pivotal players in reform agenda, not as its targets but as its leaders, the researchers sought to answer the following questions:

- 1) To what extent and how did teachers change their view of theory assisted practice as a result of engaging in collaborative inquiry?
- 2) What aspects of the school leadership role need to change in order to be successful in promoting collaborative inquiry?

### What did the researchers do?

Drawing on informal testimonies and formal interviews from six school leaders, the authors of this paper examined the role of school leadership in creating and supporting job-embedded learning.

### What you need to know...

Meeting the challenge of building a culture of collaborative inquiry and taking on the role of instructional leader created dilemmas for school leaders. Resistance to engage in collaborative work was “predicated on the strong adherence to norms of professional autonomy and privacy” (p. 235). The authors outlined a continuum of understanding about the relationship between theory and practice.

#### Level 1: Efficiency View

Practitioners are deeply skeptical about the practical value of theory and seek out professional development experiences based on a ‘what works’ philosophy. This view is often predominant in school boards where teacher learning is bureaucratically controlled through training oriented models.

#### Level 2: Knowledge for Practice

Practitioners are made aware of research that is ‘out there’ and encouraged to use it in their practice. Teaching is understood as a process of applying received knowledge to a practical situation.

#### Level 3: Knowledge in Practice

Both teachers and leaders use theory to explain how they develop and guide practice. “This view is predicated upon fresh forms of collegial learning where teacher participation reflects evident changes in teachers’ regard for theory and understanding of its connection to practice” (p. 232).

#### Level 4: Knowledge of Practice

Through inquiry practitioners, “stand in a different relation to knowledge” (p. 232). They make their own knowledge and practice public and subject to scrutiny.

### What did the researchers find?

The authors concluded that participation in collaborative inquiry not only resulted in changes in teachers’ practice, it validated teachers’ sense of themselves as professionals.

The authors argued that in order to be successful in promoting knowledge of practice, which not only holds the potential to affect knowledge, attitudes and practices of individuals, but to also transform cultures, school leaders needed to do more than support teachers’ efforts in re-conceptualizing practice. School leaders must become “authentic learners and integral players

in the learning environments they endeavour to create” (p. 233). They must become participant learners by “inquiring, studying, reading, writing, analyzing, questioning, and contributing to the collective understanding” (p. 234).

The authors stated that the creativity and knowledge to continue this work already exists. They question, however, whether the energy, discipline and patience to study what is involved in transformational professional learning exists and whether or not we have the courage to test our capacity for commitment to sustain such change.