

researchsnapshot



Learning from Dilemmas: Teacher Professional Development Through Collaborative Action and Reflection

Source of Research: Roblin, N., & Margalef, L. (2013). *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*. 19(1), 18-32. Routledge.

What is this research about?

This case study examined interpersonal and intrapersonal dilemmas experienced by teachers as they engaged in collaborative inquiry and has implications regarding the type of support necessary to assist participants in dealing with these dilemmas.

Interpersonal conflict resulted from tensions that arose when differences in beliefs and expectations surfaced. Teachers found difficulty balancing personal goals and interests with the team's and at times, experienced collaboration as an obstacle. Intrapersonal conflict revolved around the uncertainty of changing practice and trying new approaches in the classroom. Teachers started to question and revise personal beliefs as they implemented new classroom activities.

What did the researchers do?

Over a period of nine months, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews and observed participants throughout the duration of two cycles of inquiry. For those involved in this study, the potential for learning and change was dependent on the way in which participants managed the conflict (suppressed or embraced) that arose. **The ways in which teachers negotiated both interpersonal and intrapersonal dilemmas contributed to teacher learning.**

What you need to know...

The pace and depth to which teachers became aware of dilemmas and ways in which they chose to manage them varied significantly. In regard to the interpersonal dilemmas derived from collaboration, some participants distanced themselves from the team. When teachers perceived they could accomplish the same or better results alone, they were less motivated to work together. In regard to intrapersonal dilemmas, the uncertainty teachers felt was not easy to manage and therefore, some adopted "a more conservative approach which kept them from exploring the full potential of new teaching and learning activities" (p. 28). Some tried to avoid and/or reduce uncertainty by maintaining the structure of more conventional student assignments.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that participants of collaborative inquiry required adequate support as dilemmas were exposed. Once participants in this study acknowledged and embraced dilemmas, they were able to experience learning gains. The collaborative inquiry team enabled critical reflection necessary for individuals to acknowledge uncertainty and provided the support necessary for individuals to take risks. The researchers noted that "once teachers felt more comfortable with uncertainty, they were able to move towards more flexible teaching approaches" (p. 28). Helping teachers manage dilemmas can result in opportunities for learning and change.

The researchers noted that engagement in critical reflection was vital to fostering learning since it brought dilemmas to the surface and exposed differing opinions. Reflection resulted in teachers questioning their beliefs and considering alternative points of view. In addition, the researchers noted that "only when teachers – with time – were able to witness the impact of the new strategies on their own students' learning as well as on the results obtained by their colleagues, they started to 'let go', embrace the uncertainty derived from the new activities, and take the challenge of exploring its potential" (p. 27).

The authors concluded that managing these dilemmas required time and persistence.