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Collective Learning from Success Among Middle School English
Teachers:
Factors that Foster or Inhibit the Process of Learning from Success

Meran Halevy

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Abstract

In contemporary dynamic and developing school environments, teachers must embrace creative and innovating approaches towards their teaching. A relatively dynamic process, popular in the last few decades is Problem Based Learning (PBL), which is teachers' collective learning based on their problems and failures. Learning from failures does not facilitate significant learning since the process causes teachers to refrain from sharing and learning from others. In contrast, teachers' *Collective learning from Success* is a positive dynamic framework in which each participant's behavior and thinking are acknowledged.

My study focuses on this specific method of positive collective *learning from success*. The objective of this method is to identify the actions that lead to teachers' success and to share these strategies with other teachers. Concurrently, learning from success facilitates professional discourse among teachers. By fostering a positive learning environment, learning from success expands opportunities to generate change not only in the teachers' learning process, but also in the general learning climate within schools.

The literature review examines the notion of collective learning from success and explores the importance of this method as a tool for promoting the sharing of ideas and facilitating enrichment among a school's teachers. Moreover, the literature review examines the factors that either assist or prevent the process of learning from success.

The purpose of my study was to examine teachers' perceptions regarding collective learning from success over one academic year. The study also examined the benefits of learning from success after teachers were exposed to other teachers' successes and identified the fundamental factors that contributed to their success. In addition, the study identified factors that inhibited the implementation of the process of learning from success among the teaching staff.

The study investigated teachers' perception of this method as well as the extent to which they were open to learning from other teachers' successes and wished to apply what they had learned in their own classrooms. The basic assumption of the study was that teachers' collective learning from their own successes would facilitate

positive social interaction among the teaching staff, contribute to their professional development, and would ultimately facilitate students' improved learning.

The sample for this longitudinal study, which was conducted over one academic year, consisted of four middle-school English teachers in a junior high school in south Tel Aviv. All four participants were women (ages ranging 40–60). The study included the following: four initial personal interviews conducted at the beginning of the academic year in which the teachers' perceptions of collective learning from success were examined, four group sessions conducted during the academic year, at the end of which, each of the participants also wrote her reflections on how she had felt in the specific session, and four final personal interviews conducted at the end of the academic year. The data was then collected and processed.

The findings revealed several factors that assisted or inhibited the process of learning from success. The five factors that contributed to the process of learning from successes among teachers were the following: collegiality, a sense of belonging, openness to learning, friendship, support and encouragement from staff members, and personal and professional confidence. Four factors were found to inhibit or prevent teachers' learning from success: lack of support by school management, personal characteristics, lack of time and suboptimal use of resources, and negative interactions among the staff.

The findings of my study showed that after the participants' initial interviews, they supported the method of learning from each other's successes. By the end of the process, teachers had a better understanding of this method and were willing to implement what they had learnt in their own classes. The study contributed to the teachers' perceptions, which shifted from learning from problems and failures to a process of collective learning from success. The teachers perceived the process as empowering and enriching. Furthermore, by sharing and analyzing their own and their colleagues' successes, the teachers attained a deeper understanding of the effect they had and the significant role they played in their students' lives. Learning from successes is most effective and meaningful when there is friendship, as well as mutual support, and encouragement among the teachers. These factors impacted the teachers' openness to participate in the learning process and to feel confident to share their own successes and to evaluate their colleagues' successes. External factors such as support

by school management, lack of time for these sessions, and suboptimal use of time constitute obstacles for such of collective learning by teachers. The participant teachers' personal characteristics affect this process; for example, the fear of being perceived as arrogant or as bragging may prevent sharing and detrimentally affect the learning process. The intrateam interactions also impact the success of the process; for example, jealousy and lack of support between participants affect the teachers and interfere with the learning process.

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature since it demonstrates the importance of learning from positive experiences and reveals the prerequisites for implementing a process of learning from success within a teaching staff. In order to achieve significant learning from success among a teaching staff, its members need to enjoy supportive friendships, a sense of collegiality and to feel that they are a significant part of the group. They will thus feel more confident to share their experiences and opinions. A lack of support by school management, suboptimal utilization of the time that is available, and negative interaction among staff members diminish the chances of learning from the successes of other staff members.

The study concludes with implications for teachers and school management. Both teachers and school management play important roles in implementing collective learning from successes among teaching staffs.

Finally, in view of the limitations of this study, several suggestions are made for future research.