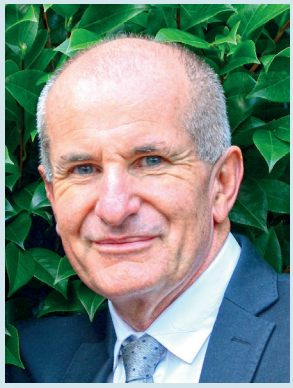

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THE THREE STRANDS OF TEAMWORK: LEARNING, DIALOGUE AND TRUST

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ТРИ СОСТАВЛЯЮЩИЕ КОМАНДНОЙ РАБОТЫ: ОБУЧЕНИЕ, ДИАЛОГ И ДОВЕРИЕ

Teamwork requires intentional effort on a daily basis. It may flourish when school leaders, team leaders and teachers intentionally position themselves as learners so team learning may occur. One approach to enhancing teamwork in teacher teams is through collaborative inquiry, provided the three strands of teamwork mutually support each other through day-to-day practice. These strands are learning, dialogue and trust.

Key words: *teamwork, collaborative inquiry, team learning, student learning, dialogue, trust*

Работа в команде требует ежедневных целенаправленных усилий. Она может быть успешной, когда руководители школ, лидеры групп и учителя намеренно позиционируют себя как обучающихся, что позволяет им учиться в команде. Одним из подходов к улучшению командной работы в учительском коллективе является совместное исследование при условии, что три составляющие командной работы взаимно дополняют друг друга в повседневной практике. Этими составляющими являются обучение, диалог и доверие.

Ключевые слова: *командная работа, совместное исследование, командное обучение, обучение учеников, диалог, доверие*

A rope generally consists of three strands, where each strand always touches the other two strands. When a rope is placed under strain, the three strands are drawn closer together, thus strengthening the rope. If at any point one of the three strands is damaged or is weaker, then the whole rope is weakened and not just that one strand. It is the same with teamwork in schools, whether the context is a school leadership team, a curriculum team, or a pastoral care team. The three strands of learning, dialogue and trust must co-exist and mutually work together to strengthen the 'rope' of teamwork. A rope does not exist until the three strands are intentionally woven together. Likewise, a group may consist of people whose focus is learning, with communication occurring across some group members and not others, and there may be some trust between some members of the group and not others. However, this type of group is not yet an example of teamwork. The intentionality of weaving these strands together is a practice of leadership where a group leader pays attention to the potential of collective practice rather than assuming a group of talented teachers will automatically generate cohesiveness if left to themselves. Developing teamwork is not a process of osmosis. The following sections of this article focus on the three strands and conclude with the coming together as a form of teamwork and shared commitment.

Learning

Learning is central to teamwork. In education, and especially with teachers, learning has two dimensions. The first is related to intra-team dynamics and related team outcomes such as collaborative practice, shared understanding, responsible risk-taking and collective responsibility. This is related to how well team members learn to work together as a unit and can be known as team learning *[1]*. The second refers to why teachers and school leaders work together towards a common purpose. The 'why' is the focus on student learning and what conditions and pedagogical practices enhance the conditions for student learning. There is unity and diversity in play here. Diversity, due to the different learning approaches students use and teachers adjusting their pedagogy, so students' zones of proximal learning are engaged. The unity here is revealed in the shared commitment of teachers and for them to learn from each other. This closes the loop and connects the focus on student learning back to team learning. However, it may not happen unless there are intentional teacher-reflective processes embedded across the teams in a school. One of these is the combination of collaboration with teacher inquiry.

TEACHER INQUIRY IS WHEN A TEACHER CONDUCTS THEIR INQUIRY INTO HOW ANY CHANGES TO THEIR TEACHING ARE ENHANCING THE LEARNING OF THEIR STUDENTS

Collaboration can take multiple forms, and they are shaped by the conditions informing collaborative practice. There is no general single practice of collaboration. This is because collaboration is influenced by outside and interpersonal factors within a team. These factors are usually mediated by a team leader, a school middle leader, who has a focus outside of the team and a focus within the team *[2]*. Collaboration may range from a leader consulting with a team where a response is sought to full participation where all team members, including the team leader, have equal voice and influence *[3]*. Therefore, a key point of consideration is how much collaboration is evident across a team of teachers, especially with decision-making related to enhancing the conditions of student learning.

Teacher inquiry is when a teacher conducts their inquiry into how any changes to their teaching are enhancing the learning of their students. This is conducted by teachers rather than having someone conduct an inquiry on a teacher *[4]*. The latter is akin to a form of collaboration discussed above where a team leader monitors and seeks a response from a teacher. This is different from collaborative inquiry as a form of teamwork. Collaborative inquiry as a form of teamwork can lead to teachers having a shared focus and understanding as to what contributes to student learning *[5]*, *[6]*. In a small-scale study across several schools in Auckland, New Zealand, we found that collaborative inquiry contributed to changes in teacher practice as well as contributing to improved relations between teachers and improving teachers' understanding of students' learning needs, provided inquiry-informed conversations between teachers were planned *[7]*. A key responsibility of the team leader and school leaders is to ensure this planned time is protected and formalised in school planning. Over the ten years my colleagues and I have worked alongside these schools, we have noted how each school has developed a school culture of inquiry as a form of teamwork *[8]*. We have found that one key factor with this has been school leadership teams developing their leadership inquiry into how they can best support team leaders, who in turn support teachers in their team with their collaborative inquiries. This has meant a focus on leader and teacher learning within and across teams, as well as focusing on enhancing student learning. This dual focus on learning so that teamwork is developed requires two more components or threads, dialogue and trust.

Dialogue

In this section, the term dialogue is not used to describe a general conversation between two people or a discussion within a group. Instead, dialogue is used to distinguish it from discussion. In this case, the dialogue goes deeper and is associated with teachers and leaders surfacing and testing their assumptions, so that known and unknown guiding values are revealed. Team learning, a key component of enhancing teamwork, places this form of dialogue, where assumptions are tested, as central to how team members learn to work well together [9], *[10]*. In addition, some education research studies show that unless teachers test their own beliefs and theories of practice and challenge their deep assumptions about individual students and how students learn, then student outcomes are less likely to improve [11–14]. Planned collaborative inquiry between teachers, which is supported by school middle leaders, is a key place where this form of dialogue *[15]* is required if both teacher pedagogy and student learning are to improve. Here, the strand of learning in its two forms, teacher to teacher and teacher to student, is woven alongside dialogue. One cannot develop without the other.

There are implications not just for collaborative teacher practice and teamwork here but also for leadership practice, both at the team level through team leaders and at the school-wide or department-faculty level. Challenging-to-have conversations about practice are commonplace in schools. Whether they take place or not is another matter. In some teams or schools, these conversations may take place in others; defensiveness and fear may prevent critical issues

and untested assumptions linked to pedagogy and student learning from surfacing. Defensiveness and reluctance to have these challenging conversations are barriers to team learning and teamwork *[16]*, *[17]*, *[18]*. Team and school leaders are key in managing the interpersonal dilemmas that may arise where defensiveness inhibits dialogue and team learning *[19]*. This may require specific leadership training over time, similar to what we experienced in our work with schools *[20]*. I have found in my 20 years of teaching at a postgraduate level in educational leadership that it is this area of leadership and teacher development where I have seen the greatest transformation in people and their practice. Moving to a culture of dialogue requires trust.

Trust

Relational trust is essential for effective leadership and collaborative practice *[21]*, *[22]*, *[23]*. Trust, however, is not only a prerequisite before teamwork can flourish. Trust can also be viewed as an emerging phenomenon because of processes that may enhance teamwork, such as collaborative inquiry and dialogue. Trust or distrust is always 'at the door' of practice in the present time. For example, one word or look may be used in a conversation that either builds trust or lessens it.

Another example that may lead to distrust is when some teachers or leaders are defensive when inquiring about their practice, which limits their learning. A possible reason is that they do

not experience sufficient psychological safety and trust to engage in dialogue where vulnerabilities may be shared *[24]*. Psychological safety is a key to developing teamwork and is associated with the degree of trust teachers and leaders attribute to their group and school settings. Trust as a form of social capital can be either accumulated or weakened through our daily interactions and activities *[25]*.

The potential of building trust is always in flow because it exists in the relational and collaborative practices that permeate day-to-day school activity. For an individual, this is also related to questions like: "Am I valued?", "Am I heard?", "Am I seen?", "How do I know that I contribute?". For a team, like a school department or faculty, building school-wide trust is related to questions like: "Is our team valued?", "Do senior leaders understand and see what we do?", "Are we lessening competition between teams in our school?", "Is our teaching subject or subjects seen as equal to other subjects in other teams?". Answering some of these questions in teams and across schools may require an openness to learning and a commitment to dialogue if trust is to be not only maintained but also strengthened.

Conclusion

All three strands of learning, dialogue and trust make up the 'rope' of teamwork. The stronger a rope, the more strain it can withstand, especially under pressure. To experience teamwork, it takes shared commitment from everyone involved through every level of a school's organisational structure. Establishing and maintaining a school culture of teamwork is an ongoing leadership practice. Doing the same, particularly in teams of teachers, like subject departments, may be enhanced if collaborative inquiry takes place with the intention of further improving pedagogy and how students learn.

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