



How does collaborative
professional enquiry impact on
culture, professionalism and a
school's capacity to improve?

Exploring the views of senior
leaders in Wales

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Background and context

- Evaluations of the Welsh education system identify us as underperforming relative to both domestic and international peers.
- Welsh education system is undergoing significant transformation focusing on developing schools and the system as learning organisations.
- Learning organisations are defined by being in an adaptive state that is responsive to opportunity and threat.
- Policymakers pushing towards developing professional capital through collaborative working practices within and across schools in Wales. This is particularly necessary given the relative size of the education system in Wales and its elected deviation from other systems.

Background and context

- Collaboration recognised as a common feature of working practices in educationally high performing countries. There are many reports that underline the importance of teachers' professional collaboration in creating better school and system performance (Hattie, 2015).
- Evidence to support that collaboration has an impact on what it seeks to change for pupils, often pupil outcomes.
- Limited evidence to support that collaboration has impacts further or wider than this and, if it does, what it impacts on as well as how and why it has that impact. This is the identified gap in the empirical evidence.
- Collaboration carries significant costs for valuable and finite resources. There is therefore demand for new knowledge to be contributed to this area.

Background and context

- Findings from earlier qualitative research, utilising a very small sample of three education leaders in Wales, suggested that collaboration was considered to have an impact on school culture, practitioners' professionalism and the school's capacity to improve.

Aims and objectives

Aim

To explore Welsh education leaders' experiences of collaborative professional enquiry to determine if and how it impacts on culture, professionalism and a school's capacity to improve.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows:

- To understand the perceptions of the purpose of collaborative professional enquiry within a school.
- To evaluate the impact of collaborative professional enquiry on a school.
- To evaluate the impact of collaborative professional enquiry on a school's culture, professionalism and improvement capacity.
- To understand the potential impact of collaborative professional enquiry on the capacity of a school to improve.
- To offer useful recommendations to schools about the implementation of collaborative professional enquiry.

Indicative review of the literature

The existence of impact measurement and/or evaluation is not common in collaborative professional enquiry (Harris et al, 2017) and where it is present, it tends to look to student outcomes (Kools, 2016).

Potential bias issue with findings from grey literature and government funded research outputs.

- Evaluations of impact at system level (Estyn, 2024; Kools & Stoll, 2020; Harris et al, 2022,; OECD, 2016).
- Narratives of collaboration at individual and school level (Evans, 2021; Evans et al, 2022)

Indicative review of the literature

Empirical findings to support **cultural changes**

- Descriptions of a 'workplace shift' (DeLuca et al, 2018)
- Change from previous ways of working (Cherkowski and Schnellert, 2017)
- Common goals bringing benefits to pupils (Hargreaves, 2019)
- A 'way of life' (Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006)
- Valuing others (Campbell et al, 2016)

Indicative review of the literature

Empirical findings to support **developing professionalism**

- Goal to create an environment that supports developing professionalism (Carpenter, 2017)
- Some issues with understanding the purpose to collaboration in evaluating it (Arkhipenka et al, 2018)

Indicative review of the literature

Empirical findings to support **impact on school improvement capacity**

- Improving schools demonstrate increasingly accurate decision making and improved agility and flexibility (Mourshed et al, 2010)
- Observation of professional standards in teaching infrequent, inconsistent and largely disparate with other professions (Schleicher, 2018)

Proposed methodology

- Qualitative, interpretivist and inductive (Bryman, 2016).
- Deep insights, rich data, used to inform theory building from generating an understanding of the concepts by understanding participants' interpretation.
- 10-12 leaders, general purposive sampling, variety of leadership experiences/roles/responsibilities.
- Semi-structured interviews. Recorded, transcribed and a narrative analysis applied to identify themes and evidence to support them.
- Follow up focus group to 'test' the themes and gather further information from discourse to navigate to a measure of generalisability.
- Reflexivity – insider research (Ryan, 2015), biases including confirmatory bias.
- Ensuring validity is present from sufficient evidence being present to support the phenomena depicted (Hammersley, 1995).

Proposed methodology

1. Has the culture of the school changed since the implementation of collaborative professional enquiry?

- Can you describe the outputs and outcomes of collaborative professional enquiry?
- How has the process of collaborative professional enquiry impacted the culture? What is different to before? What do you feel it gives us as a school?
- How much of this would you attribute to collaborative professional enquiry itself?

2. Has collaborative professional enquiry impacted the development of individuals in terms of their professionalism?

- How?
- What has changed?
- How are people different?
- What has that impacted on?

3. Have you observed a change in improvement processes and improvement successes in relation to collaborative professional enquiry?

- Do you feel that ** has improved as a school since collaborative professional enquiry has been implemented?
- What aspects have we improved and how?

Ethical considerations

- Seek ethical approval from UWTSD.
- Follow the UWTSD code of practice.
- Ensuring that the research adds value, possible alignment with the Future Generations Act 2015 aims.
- Participant information and agreement form for consent.
- Participants briefed - purpose, format, data processing, use and storage, confidentiality, withdrawal and implications of withdrawal, omission of aspects.
- Time, space, location, participant comfort, mechanism of recording.
- Mitigate against risks to participants, researcher, environment, institution.
- Appropriate de-brief and feedback for participants.

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