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Relational agency of teachers in collaboration practices in a full-service school

Teachers are considered the most important role players to implement inclusive education. Collaborating with colleagues and professionals is considered as a key skill to solve complex problems with colleagues and professionals. Generally, different types of collaboration, determined by the task focus of the activities are used. Relational agency seems to be a valuable concept to unravel teachers' use of collaboration. This expertise enables teachers to solve problems with others by using each other's knowledge, skills and sensemaking of the problem. Therefore, the aim of the study was to find out how teachers develop relational agency during collaboration in a full-service school.

A qualitative, case study research design was used within an interpretive-constructivist paradigm. Purposeful sampling was applied to identify the school and four teachers who volunteered to take part in the study. Semi-structured interviews offered in-depth qualitative descriptions of cooperation. The data analysis was done according to the constructivist grounded theory. The participants' responses were coded and grouped according to themes. The cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) served as a theoretical framework to interpret the data findings within the context of a full-service school.

The main findings of the study indicate that teachers use collaboration as a tool to expand their knowledge and skills. The use of deeper levels of collaboration and a higher grade of team entitativity enhanced the development of relational agency. The study results show that relational agency, relational expertise and common knowledge are interwoven and connected. Relational expertise and common knowledge are, therefore, essential for the development of relational agency. In addition to this, the development of relational agency is also supported by the building of relationships, the gaining of knowledge from one another, taking action to solve contradictions in the system (agency) and, lastly, the use of self-evaluation and reflection to promote teaching practices.