

Impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning: A Review

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Abstract:

Researchers and professionals cited the Professional Learning Community (PLC) because of its capability to impact student achievement in a positive manner. It is recommended to foster collaboration of PLC and make teacher practice public to improve the quality of teaching and learning in this current scenario of high risk of accountability. This review study presents 10 American studies and one English study on the impact of the PLCs on teaching practices and student learning after the overview of the characteristics of professional learning communities. It is suggested by the result that on both teaching practice and student learning the well developed PLCs makes a positive impact. It is also included to implicate the research and suggestions for the further research in the efforts to document the impact of PLC on teaching and learning.

Keywords: *Professional learning communities, Communities of practice, Teacher collaboration, Professional development*

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Introduction

There are example of shift gathering momentum in professional development of teachers since last 20 years. The complexities of teaching and learning induces climate of increasing accountability which helps to reform the professional development beyond merely supporting the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for teachers. Professional development necessitates helping teachers rethinking which includes dual capacity in the teacher of both teaching and learning and also includes creation of new visions of what, when and how, it is suggested by the Darling Hammond and McLaughlin. Institutional structures that governs schooling ultimately requires a fundamental change as per the most recent model of professional development. There are many articles that praise the virtues of teaching communities in current professional developmental literature as an important factor to organize schools but recently it is shifted to examining the changes in practices of teacher and learning of students as a result of PLCs. Although, it is both valid and valuable perceptions of teacher about the value of PLCs but it is crucial in this scenario of unusual resources and accountability to understand the outcomes of these activities of teaching practice and student learning. Here, first provide an overview of the essential characteristics of PLCs and after the development of this foundation examination of current literature is done which relates to two basic questions that are

1. As a result of participation in a PLC, teaching practices changes in which ways and these changes are supported by what aspects of the PLCs?
2. Does the assumptions that student learning increases along with the participation of the teacher in PLC are supported by the literature and the increased student learning are supported by what aspects? (Vescio, Ross and Adams, 2008)

Essential characteristics of professional learning communities

The concept of PLC is originated from the business sectors in respect to the organizational capacity to learn. The learning organization became learning community that attempts to develop collaborative work cultures for teachers (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). There are two assumptions on which learning communities are based includes an assumption that the knowledge is enhanced by the day by day experiences of teachers and is best understand by the critical reflection of the experience with others (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). The other

assumption is that the actively participating teachers in PLCs enhances their professional skills and the learning capacity of the students. Teachers must critically observe and examine the results of efforts made by the students for the achievements. Results can be proved by the PLCs in the form of data indicating the changed teaching practices and improved learning of students.

Professional learning communities and teaching practice

PLC works on the principle of improving student learning by improving teaching practice. Guiding questions are mainly focused in this review such as a result of participation in a PLC, teaching practices changes in which ways and these changes are supported by what aspects of the PLCs? Dunne et al., (2000) documented the finding of 2 years study in groups by Annenberg Institute for School Reform and used interview and observation data to compare the practices of non participants in his study. He stated that for the accommodation of varying level of student content mastery, the use of techniques such as added flexibility of classroom arrangements and changes in the pace of instruction is increased by the participants. However, the power of reported findings is decreased as the researchers did not provide the data about practices at the beginning of the study. The presence of professional community in a school contributes to higher levels of social support for the achievement and higher levels of authentic pedagogy is documented by the Louis and Marks (1998). He also account that their model providing robust support to demonstrate the impact of PLC on classroom practice as their model only accounts for 36% of the variance in the quality of classroom pedagogy.

Professional learning communities and school culture

Since the professional culture of the school demonstrate that establishing a PLC contributes to a fundamental shift in the habits of mind that teachers bring to their daily work in the classroom therefore it is the significant findings in pedagogy. The empirical data cited by all the 11 studies suggesting that there is a change had occurred in the professional culture of the school. For the promotion of changes in teaching cultures there seems to be characteristics innate in learning communities. It is also important to note that we recognize the complexity of this process as it plays out in different lived contexts, even as we attempt to compartmentalize the processes that are integral to the goals of PLC. Unfortunately, our only path for analysis lies in the less than desirable actions of simplifying and classifying what is actually complex and contextual.

Professional learning communities and school culture includes following points which an essential role.

1. Collaboration
2. A focus on student learning
3. Teacher authority
4. Continuous teacher learning

Professional learning communities and student achievement

It is proven by the previous literature that the PLCs affects the teaching. Now the question is, does it also affects on students bor not? The viability of PLCs will be determined by their success in enhancing student achievement the viability of PLCs will be determined by their success in enhancing student achievement in an educational climate which is increasingly directed by the demands of accountability. This makes it incumbent upon educators to demonstrate how their work in learning communities improves student learning.

Review of Literature

Stoll et al., (2006) reviewed on professional learning communities and his in this review his international evidences suggested that educational reform's progress depends on teacher's individual and collective capacity and its link with school wide capacity for promoting pupil's learning. He concluded that this is a timely moment to unpack the meaning and consequences of professional community at the level of practice.

Vescio, Ross and Adams, (2007) take 10 American studies and one English study in their review on impact of profession learning communities Implications of this research and suggestions for next steps in the efforts to document the impact of PLCs on teaching and learning are included. Their review is limited by their decision to report only published or vetted research because of the review process is a strategy for determining the quality of research reports.

Usun, (2009) worked on the comparative review the strategies of preparing teachers to use of new Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) in teacher education programs in the world and Turkey introducing international applications on utilizing ICT in teacher training. Conclusion found in this review was that there is an urgent need of fast growing and relevant empirical research in this field.

Lee and Lee, (2013) worked on case study of exploring the empirical fit of two professional learning community in Singapore and found out that the conceptualization of the construct to be inextricable from the history of how national level reform has been

institutionalized. Aspirations for a Fullan-inspired approach are evident, but still rest in the stage of conceptualization.

Hairon et al., (2015) worked on an agenda for professional learning communities: moving forward for increasing the individual and collective capacity of teachers. They proposed six aspects pertaining to methodological rigor for supporting the professional learning community research.

Ratts et al., (2015) examined the elementary teachers and descriptions of their professional learning community. Results indicated the positive correlations between teacher level of education and bserving peers and also found positive correlation between student works, working with colleagues to judge the quantity of student work, and discussing centered educational issues.

Zhang, Yuan and Yu, (2016) studied on the barriers of the development of professional learning communities in China and perceptions from leaders and frontline teachers in three schools of Shanghai. Result shows that the barriers identified by teachers in the development of professional learning communities involves insufficient collaborative time, ineffective school leadership, unfavorable accountability policy, and lack of collaborative professional culture.

Dogan, Tatik and Yurtseven, (2017) worked on professional learning communities assessment adaptaions, internal validity, and multidimensional model testing in Turkish context. They also modeled the relationship between individual, interpersonal and organizational dimensions of professional learning communities accounting for teacher characteristics and school contextual factors after the completion of adaptation study for elementary teachers.

Conclusion

Review of literature that is which literature has to be include or which has to be exclude based on the guiding questions for the review is an interpretation and this election or selection of reviews shapes the conclusion. The reports that describes work within PLCs does not reported in this review, and the results of reflective self reports are also not mentioned because of valid and significant perspectives of teachers that the work is so precised and accurate. This review is based on the empirical studies that connects the changes in teaching practices and student learning with PLCs. This review is focused on the few published studies which clearly shows the positive impact of learning community model on both teachers and students.

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