Chapter 53: Professional Learning Communities in Education

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Abstract: In this paper, we found that teachers and principals prioritize building strong relationships with students and providing support for their success. The school staff focuses on the best interests of the students and stays updated on new educational methods. Teacher Kayla Owens is highlighted as successful for her adaptable teaching strategies and collaborative approach. The principals distribute tasks, offer support to new teachers, and encourage open meetings for idea exchange. The Professional Learning Community (PLC) model is considered effective and recommended for implementation in the author's Saudi Arabian school. The interviewed individuals have offered support for establishing a PLC.

Introduction

"Never doubt that a small group of committed, thoughtful people can change the world: Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has!" – Margaret Mead, American anthropologist, 1901-1978

 A school's job is not about teaching but about learning. It is important to always try to improve students' skills, so they learn how to learn. One of the best ways to be sure that everyone involved with the students are focused on learning is to create a professional learning community. A professional learning community is teachers, principals and parents that work together to support the success of students.

The idea of schools in the United States being the center of a community is over 100 years old. (LERN, n.d.). The school as a place for both education and a place to centralize lifestyle and societal needs for children was the vision of education scholars like John Dewey and Jane Addams and Clarence Perry, a powerful city planner. "Community-based education provided a source for creating both social cohesion and improving the lives of community residents" (para. 2).

Before the 1990s, the teachers worked individually. They prepared the lesson and explained it to the students without the help of anyone. They also solved problems on their own, in isolation from the school community. After the1990s, some studies started to focus more on how teachers improved their skills by sharing the best ideas that helped students to achieve their goals.

Learning in all of their schools, virtually all of the leading educational researchers and all professional organizations have agreed that the best hope for improving the schools is to focus on developing the capacity of the people within the schools. Successful PLCs have been shown to improve the performance of students and a school overall. Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber (2010) looked at the highest performing school systems in all the world and they found that what those systems had in common was a conscious effort made to develop the capacity of teachers and improve the quality of the instruction that the students receive every single day

through the collective efforts of their teacher and school leaders. This effort makes a powerful difference in the low-scoring students and helps students who have problems in learning to enhance their outcomes by giving them extra time and support.

Darling-Hammond, Hyler and Gardner (2017) propose the most important features of effective professional development are that it:

- is content focused
- is of sustained duration
- uses active learning based on adult learning theory
- supports job-embedded collaboration
    - models best practices
    - offers coaching and expert support
    - provides time for feedback and reflection

Today a lot of the schools apply PLCs because they found it is a positive link between teacher professional development, teaching practices, and student outcomes.

Studies have found the best way to increase education outcomes is to develop teachers and provide them with skills in the form of professional communities in which teachers share their ideas and plans in preparing lessons and exchanging experiences between them as a community.

Annotated Bibliograph

Halverson, R., (2003, October 10). Systems of practice: How leaders use artifacts to create professional community in schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *11*(37). doi:https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v11n37.2003

This article is about professional learning communities in education. The researcher divided the paper into two parts. The first section focuses on the organizational framework of a professional learning community and the standards that should be in the organization. In the second part, the researcher explained how to use the analytical framework for leadership practices that works to develop a high-level professional community in an urban primary school in Chicago.

Higher performance from students has been measured in schools that have the staff all work together being responsible for student learning and routinely collaborating to improve curriculum, procedures and their own development. This is a strong professional learning community. Moreover, leadership and responsibility are the most important elements of a successful PLC. Leaders recognize that universal high expectations for all students require ambitious improvements in curriculum, instruction, assessment, leadership practices, and support systems. These improvements require effective professional learning to expand educators' knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions. The author attempted to identify contributing artifacts (i.e., policies, programs and procedures) that leaders have used to generate and shape the system of practice in the school. These artifacts taken together help to enable tasks which create and sustain intentional interpersonal relations in schools. School leaders created professional community by using artifacts to shape the local system of practice – creating simultaneous instances of levels of closure that consequently help to form a special

kind of social capital. Instructional leadership practice is in part constituted by the ways leaders seek to develop and manipulate the artifacts available within the system of practice. Mapping the artifacts that local leaders create and adapted to shape instruction is an important way to understand the development of professional community.

This source was very helpful to see the basic steps for a PLC and how to use the one model in different schools and the challenges they found.

Sai, X., & Siraj, S. (2015, April). Professional learning community in education: Literature review. *The Online Journal of Quality in Higher Education, 2*(2), 65-78. https://www.tojqih.net/journals/tojqih/articles/v02i02/v02i02-07.pdf

This article is about three models for PLCs in use in the U.K. These models were created by three authors/teachers that created models to increase the outcome and effectiveness of learning. The models are DuFour's Model, Senge's Model, and Hord's Model. All these teachers created the model of a professional learning community have also written books in the field of education that carry ideas and visions that work to develop the educational environment.

Rick DuFour and his colleagues say professional learning communities are not a series of interviews and meetings. They propose that a good PLC has the following attributes:

- Clear identification of the skills and knowledge that students should acquire
- Evaluation practices that are consistently applied
- Joint training assessments
- Formative assessments to assess and provide students with timely intervention
- Teaching effectiveness measured with data
- SMART goals focusing on advanced educational practices
- An exchange of research-based practices
- Goal to help all students to reach high levels as a goal
- Focus on using team time in student learning.

Senge's Model for a PLC is based on five material disciplines in order to be effective:

- mental models
- team learning
- shared vision
- personal mastery
- systems thinking

Hord's Model shows five characteristics to describe the PLC which are:

- supportive and shared leadership - collective creativity - shared values and vision - shared personal practices - supportive conditions for sustaining the learning community.

Several challenges affect an effective school learning system such as environment and culture for teachers, students, and the director. Cooperation and standardization of the vision helps the

school. To achieve its goals that a school wants to achieve at the end of the year and that is only done through self-organization and making plans with clear structures for what they want to accomplish by the end of the year. The teacher gives students appropriate comments for their work with reviewing the results of the students every quarter and analyzing them to know the strengths and weaknesses in their performance. Teachers search for methods and strategies that help students achieve the skills that their peers need to be compared to. The study also focused on the relationship between students and the teacher and its effect on the learning process. This is article is useful because it gave a nice brief of three professional learning community models in education.

Research Methods

I did interviews with Parkview High School principal Eric Ramsey, a Communication Arts teacher Kayla Owens, and Callie Sitton, the A+ Program Coordinator and the Coordinator of the Leadership program.

Data Collection

Procedures

I did interviews in coordination with the library official who set up a schedule in the interviews and contacted them to choose the appropriate time to conduct them. I was face to face meeting and I recorded the conversation.

Instrument and Responses

Q: How do you create goals for your building and teachers?

A: Principal Eric Ramsey said he works with his staff as a team. They look together for all dates and discuss the plane and which plane is will be work for the school community. He believes is part of the team and member of our community

Q: What systems are in place to support teachers with classroom community and behavior challenges?

A: According to Ramsey, through a relationship of mutual respect between teachers and the search for their needs and support through courses or through the team that works with him in developing teachers 'skills.

Q: Give an example of how you encourage and or require collaboration in your building? A: Ramsey said, "We are blessed through six teams and each team has a president and I follow all the teams."

Q: How do you deal with the stresses involved in being an educational leader?

A: Ramsey mentioned that he "makes a list every day with the tasks that he must complete in school. I have an excellent staff who help me with my tasks every day and we work as a team in getting things done."

Q: How do you choose teachers and the staff how work at school?

A: According to Ramsey, many teachers apply to this school but not all teachers can take on the challenges of this school. "Always look for someone who can handle challenges, can contain students and deal with their problems. Also, along with the scientific article."

Q: Are there any other insights you would like to share with me?

A: Ramsey said the elements are important to the success of the team, which is the selection of staff members, the ability to work under pressure, building strong relationships, respect for working hours, teamwork and contain students and develop their skills.

Q: Describe your experiences with the importance of relationships with students. Can you give an example of a time this had an impact on your and/or a student?

A: Communication Arts teacher Kayla Owens believes" the relationship between the teachers and the students is important in the educational process because the student always accepts the

teacher, and if he accepts the teacher, he will lend the teacher his attention. Some students find my subject difficult but if I give them some love and confidence, I find their level improves."
Q: What new teaching practices are you interested in and why?

A: Owens said, "I love teaching and I deal with them based on the way that prefers to study so we work together to choose the best way for every class, and we made evolution every chapter.

What they like and what they don't like."

Q: How do you create objectives for your class?

A: According to Owens, "I work with teachers of course in making goals every month or six weeks.

Q: How do you deal with the student they have low scores?

A: Owens remarked, "I do teach one to one, try to find what is difficult for students and use different ways and a strategy with them to achieve the goal of encouraging him."

Q: Are there any other insights you would like to share with me?

A: Owens said that "building strong relationships with the student is key for the teacher to help students develop skills."

Q: How does leadership impact the PLC?

A: Coordinator of the Leadership program Callie Sitton said that "leadership is one of the most important qualities that a worker needs in their own professional development to achieve success in a professional learning community. If the group does not have the qualifications, respect for time, and make the appropriate decisions for each stage with the exchange of confidence and the distribution of roles, then the PLC does not work as well. Because we live in a society, then we must work as a team and not as a person."

Data Analysis

Discussion

I found that all teachers and principal agree the relationship between the students and teachers is important, so all the teachers try to build a strong relationship to help teachers understand the students. Also, if the student has problems, the school tries to help the student to find the answer and give them the support to push them to be a good person in the community. All people who work at a school think "Students **First**", so the school staff always thinks about the best interest of the student and works to find the best methods that are in the best interest of the student. Therefore, they work hard to follow up on everything new in education, from new methods and theories of interest to student achievement. They also work with the student

to increase their employment skills (e.g., internships at local businesses) and help them to engage in life after graduation. The school offers full support for the student by answering his inquiries.

I think this principal is a successful person because he is based on teamwork and encouraging team spirit. Also, he'll work hard to building strong relationships with his team. I think teacher Kayla Owens is a successful person because she uses different strategies depending on the subject and student. Moreover, she works with other teachers to plan for the subject and exchange knowledge. She always looks at students as her children and has good relationships with them.

In addition to distributing tasks among the staff and respecting each individual's role, the principals provide assistance and support to new teachers or who needs support. The staff are exchanging

experiences, and that will be by holding open meetings to exchange suggestions. a fruitful division of the team and appointing heads for each group mobility, manager's point of view and employee opinions. Organizing by setting a schedule for each group and determining meeting and meeting frameworks every quarter or after tests that anticipate student results and ways to raise student achievement and educational competencies.

Summary

Based on these interviews, the PLC seems to be effective for the Springfield Public School system and should be as effective in the plan in my school in Saudi Arabia. All the people I interviewed offered to help me later once I am working on establishing a PLC in my school, so they are a valuable resource for support.

Recommendations

My project idea is about the professional learning community (PLC) and how will PLC affect the function and contribute to school and its impact on student result. I chose the topic professional learning community because I found it important to improve the school community and it is an important topic in the development of school leaders and teachers, which results in the development of educational outcomes that the Ministry of Education seeks to develop by producing students with a high degree of educational attainment and skills that help the student achieve his dream in the future. The productive school is the main building block of the educational institution. PLCs serve to organize work inside the school and exchange experiences among teachers of the same subject, which helps to exchange successful ideas and their application and discuss the difficulties and daily problems that they face. In addition, PLCs help search for a solution in a specific period which reflects positively on the performance of the school and teachers and students by providing the right environment for education to arise from professional societies which is the main goal for the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia.

School Implementation Plan

At my school, I will make a presentation and some small workshops that explain the project idea and a simplified mechanism for its work at the school level and the region in which I work and transfer my experience and what I learned and read about PLCs.

Participants / Audience

I will suggest creating a team from different grade teachers, my principal, some parents, and my supervisor. I will involve the training center administration in my city as well.

Key players / support needed

The project needs happen by working collaboratively among my principal, her staff, and community parents. The project also needs approval from the training center in my city to support teachers by courses.

Timeline

The first phase will take about six months to implement and one year of results to evaluate. When the project is approved by the Ministry of Education and the training center in my city, then I will start to apply it in my school.

Materials

To complete this project, we will need laptops and printers for teachers, a place to meet which should bemjk equipped with all the educational means that teachers need to facilitate their work, and the training center should provide training courses for teachers.

Estimated cost

The advantage of PLC is it does not need high cost. It needs place and training for staff so 30% of the school budget that enough to apply this program.

Location and scope

This project will take place first in my school, Safina Middle School and High School in Almohad City. After a year we will evaluate the project by making a survey for teachers to make sure if this project is going smoothly. When the project has been implemented successfully, we will apply this project in other schools in the districts.

Presentations / visuals

I will present this idea to my school principal and staff by creating slides, handouts, and showing them my poster. Then we will have a meeting with staff to talk about implementation. Moreover,

I will participate in conferences to present the project idea, implementation steps, and demonstrate how important it is to raise the level of the school and students. And I will use social media to show my project to reach the largest segment of teachers such as participating in educational magazines and doing courses and workshops for this project as I will participate in an initiative to apply to larger schools in the Kingdom. I will present my project to the Ministry and participate in it in the educational conference.

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