Professional Learning Communities in Singapore Schools
The Current Practice and Possibilities for Teacher Practice and Student Learning

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KEY IMPLICATIONS

- The revision of DuFour's 3 Big Ideas and 4 Critical Questions will help professional learning communities (PLCs) in schools to focus on learning among students and staff.
- Clarity of the intent, purpose, and expectations of PLC facilitate how staff learning can impact student learning, including delineating the role of principles of learning and teaching (PLTs) in planning and working on different policy-related initiatives and specifying roles and responsibilities of different groups of people (e.g. SSD, teacher leaders).
- Schools need to build staff capacity to value a culture for shared personal practice and promote the practise of pedagogical inquiry.

BACKGROUND

While there has been consistent communication of policy intent to school management, and enhanced professional development for PLC facilitators to address the challenges in implementing PLC and building a culture for workplace learning, the impact that these improvements have on collaborative professional learning in PLC remains anecdotal. It is intended that PLC will continue to be featured as a school-based professional development (PD) structure centred on improving teaching and learning. This study described the current state of PLC in order to chart the direction for the next 5 to 6 years.

FOCUS OF STUDY

This study aimed to understand the current practice, and leverages in building effective and sustainable PLC in Singapore schools.

KEY FINDINGS

1. The practice of distributed leadership in schools was limited to either SSD or PLT leaders.
2. Schools should communicate the vision, purpose and directions of PLC to staff with regard to teaching and learning, and clarify expectations of PLC and PLTs.
3. Although teaching staff valued and appreciated learning and applying strategies collectively, they may not have the appropriate skills to deepen their inquiry. Many of them communicated about limited internal expertise and time to engage in the PLT processes and reflect on their practice.

4. Although instances of sharing in PLTs are common among staff, schools have yet to build a culture of shared personal practice where they are able to share the processes of their practice, for example through peer observation.

5. There is a need to foster collegial relationships within and across PLTs, and leverage structures and leadership to drive productive staff behavior.

SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

- This study gathered and analysed evidence that is nuanced to PLC practices in Singapore schools. With the findings, the study offers ideas on revising the 3 Big Ideas and 4 Critical Questions to cast greater emphasis on staff learning to impact student learning.

- With the validated PLC instruments, i.e. PLCAR and PLCDR, AST can facilitate data driven conversations with schools on their PLC practices.

- This study surfaced preferences in PLC practices related to the local context, such as the preference for protected timetable time for weekly staff learning within curriculum hours in the morning; and the provisions of platforms to celebrate and recognize achievements of work done in PLTs motivated staff.

PARTICIPANTS

This study involved teaching staff from 8 primary and 12 secondary schools. In total, 1791 participants took part in this study. The participants include principals, vice-principals, school staff developers, teachers and allied educators.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This was a mixed-methods study involving the collection of quantitative data through an online survey, and qualitative data through focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews.

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Request for more details

Please approach the Office of Education Research, National Institute of Education, Singapore to obtain a copy of the final report.

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