

Chinese University of Hong Kong  
Department of Educational Administration and Policy

**International Symposium on  
“Global Perspectives on Developing Professional Learning Communities”  
30 May 2015 (Saturday)**

Abstracts

**Professor Jane B. HUFFMAN, University of North Texas, USA**

**Professional Learning Community Research: United States and Global Models**

While there are structural and cultural differences among countries working to achieve continuous improvement, agreement centers around strategies for shared responsibility related to student learning. Lieberman and Miller (1999) describe PLCs as “places in which teachers pursue clear, shared purposes for student learning, engage in collaborative activities to achieve their purposes, and take collective responsibility for student learning.”

Hipp and Huffman (2010) define this model as: “Professional educators working collectively and purposefully to create and sustain a culture of learning for all students and adults.” The US model for PLC includes five dimensions – Shared and Supportive Leadership, Shared Values and Vision, Collective Learning and Application, Shared Personal Practice, and Supportive Conditions. As educators in schools work together to implement these dimensions, the probability of faculty and student learning increases.

Recent research conducted by the Global PLC Network, a coalition of researchers from five countries, identifies five similar yet different constructs that represent the findings of PLC work within those countries (China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and the United States). These constructs are – Organizational Structures, Policies, and Procedures; Leadership; Professionalism; Learning Capacity; and Sense of Community. Huffman, Olivier, Wang, Chen, Hairon, and Pang (2015) propose a definition for the Global PLC model: “Communities of learning in which educators collaboratively engage to foster a culture that enhances teaching and learning for all” in a forthcoming article titled Global Conceptualization of the Professional Learning Community Process: Transitioning from Country Perspectives to International Commonalities, in-press, International Journal of Leadership in Education.

This Plenary Speech deconstructs the two models and identifies the characteristics, similarities, and differences between the models and within the countries.

**Professor Dianne F. OLIVIER, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, USA**

## Critical Role of District (Central Office) Support in the Professional Learning Community Process

As researchers, our initial investigations of the professional learning community process primarily focused at the school level. Yet as we seek to understand the essence of sustaining a high performing PLC, our interest has broadened to the support provided by and from the district level. Cowan, Joyner, and Beckwith (2012) explain that schools operate within a larger system and cite numerous studies that indicate the need to build districts' capacity to help schools improve. Skilled leadership is needed at both the district and school levels "to help create a context for change, develop necessary knowledge and competencies, and establish structures and practices to support and maintain improvement" (p. viii). Each of these endeavors builds upon one another and requires a community of professional learners.

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to share findings of a research study designed to explore district-level support of professional learning communities within elementary, middle, and secondary schools. The overarching research question is: How do school district personnel (central office staff) support schools in the professional learning community process?

Primary analyses and findings inform the study in terms of critical steps relating to the five PLC dimensions, while secondary analyses determine major findings surfacing across all data collected through interviews at various levels (central office personnel, school level administrators, and teacher leaders).

**Professor Salleh HAIRON, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore**

*Global Perspectives on Developing Professional Learning Communities*

**Professional Learning Communities in Singapore: Critical Success Factors**

Based on findings from a research study investigating the impact of PLCs on student learning outcomes, this symposium discusses seven critical success factors underpinning the effectiveness of PLCs in Singapore education. First, effective PLCs enable participation that builds shared mutual purposes on student learning goals and outcomes. Second, effective PLCs support collective learning that goes beyond just sharing knowledge on teaching; instead connecting the immediate experiences of teachers' teaching practices with teacher learning in PLCs and interrogating teachers' knowledge on teaching. Third, effective PLCs afford collective teaching approaches resulting from teacher learning in PLCs being refined to individual teachers' classroom teaching practices. Fourth, effective PLCs employ appropriate assessment to determine effectiveness of teaching strategies. Fifth, effective PLCs optimize teacher leadership to build collegial and collaborative relations, promote teacher development and learning, and enable change or improvements in teachers' teaching practices. Sixth, effective PLCs harness the leadership support across all levels of the school organization with the purpose of supporting the translation from teacher learning in PLCs to teaching practice and student learning. Finally, effective PLCs nurture positive teacher attitude towards PLCs evidenced from the practical and pragmatic translation of teacher learning in PLCs to teacher practice impacting on student learning.

**Professor Ting WANG, University of Canberra, Australia**

**A Top Performing Education System: Educational Reforms and Professional Learning Community Practices in Shanghai**

Shanghai's outstanding performance in PISA 2009 and 2012 produced a global 'PISA-shock' that has repositioned this education system as a significant new 'reference society' at the beginning of the Asian century. Is there a Shanghai Model? What are contributing factors for the stunning success of Shanghai students? Is it possible to adapt the model across different contexts? Shanghai is the leading educational system in China, and has pioneered reforms in curriculum, assessment, and equity that are being emulated elsewhere in the country. Shanghai has developed policy interventions to overcome examination orientation practices and refocus the quality of student learning experiences over quantity. The overhaul of curriculum is supported by changes in teacher education and professional development. Shanghai has a relentless focus on teaching quality and every student's learning and holistic development. It has well-established mechanisms for teacher collaboration, mentoring, class observations, and school-based action research. It also has mechanisms on bringing up weak schools through collaborative strategies. An aligned approach of pedagogical practices and teacher collaborations at the classroom, school, and system levels is a salient feature. The sense of professional responsibilities and accountability is built into programs of teacher preparation, continuing professional development and school leadership programs.

**Professor Peiyong CHEN, National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan**

**Social Capital as a Drive for Developing High School Professional Learning Communities in Taiwan**

This study aims to explore the PLC practices in two high schools in Taiwan. The schools sites were intentionally selected for these two PLC teams could be observed and documented. The total research participants in this PLC were twenty people, including teachers, principals and administrators in these two high schools.

Sense of community evolved as the team members built the bonding and collective identity of the group. The family-like affection could connect individuals with strong support. It represents as social capital to turn connection into collective energy and knitted trust that might help members to face challenges and uncertainty derived from innovation or changes. The teachers more likely took risk to initiate reform action. The team members were easily recharged as they encountered difficulties from the demands of changes.

Conclusively, the two case studies of high school PLC teams showed the positive influences of shared dialogues, practices, and values which produced collective efficacy and nurtured a culture of learning and collective efficacy. The professional beliefs and identity could be enhanced and sense of community further empowered collective innovation in face with reform challenges.

**Professor Nicholas Sun Keung PANG, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong**

**Educational Reforms and the Practices of Professional Learning Community in Hong Kong**

The educational challenge of the 21st century is to achieve higher levels of learning for all students and increase global competitiveness in a knowledge society. School reforms have targeted student learning outcomes and teaching is considered as the most powerful influence on students' achievement. International evidence suggests that the success of educational reforms depends on teachers' individual and collective capacity and links to the school-wide capacity for promoting students' learning. Since 1990s, the concept of professional learning communities (PLCs) has gained increasing attention from education systems. Research evidence consistently highlights the importance of teachers' interdependent learning and collaboration as the cornerstone of school improvement and effective professional development. The study examines critically education reforms in Hong Kong and explores the policies, strategies and practices that have promoted teachers' individual and collective capacity and linked to the school-wide capacity for promoting students' learning. This study will report the extent to which Hong Kong teachers have been practicing the essences of PLCs in daily school life, based on some preliminary qualitative and quantitative data. In sum, the study aims to investigate the development status of PLCs in Hong Kong school settings and its linkage to school improvement.

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