Conceptualizing the Setting up of a Professional Learning Community for Teachers’ Pedagogical Learning – An Article Review

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Description/Summary of Major Ideas

In this article, Feldman and Fataar (2014) focused on the subjects of professional learning community (PLC), pedagogy, social justice, action-reflection, habitus engagement, and funds of knowledge. In terms of what we have learned in relation to learning community, Fataar and Feldman took us on a journey through the conceptual bases that have informed the establishment, its functioning and the intellectual approaches on which it has been founded. The participants involved were a university lecturer, a tutor, and a number of practicing teachers.

In relation to pedagogy, Fataar and Feldman (2014) assumed that the teachers’ pedagogical learning must with a supportive and deliberative sets of social structure on an intellectual basis and pedagogical capititation that precipitate needed changes. To this end, Fataar and Feldman taught us that PLCs will inspire critical reflexivity and teachers’ pedagogies that will transform the learning experience. This, they argue, is based on action research approaches, for engaging in pedagogical learning. That is, a continuous process primarily for those interested in an experimental, messy, and recursive conversation that focuses on improving teachers' classroom teaching, and not in results-orientated teaching outcomes. This speaks to the heart of action-reflection, a major subject of the article.
Fataar and Feldman (2014) also explained to us the basis upon which a social justice oriented approach to pedagogical learning and adaptation might be pursued in a professional learning community. Fataar and Feldman (2014) were motivated by the theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), who portrayed PLCs, as a 'habitus engagement'. In an effort to describe the ways in which their dialogical processing in the PLC might engender pedagogies that inducts students into subject knowledge by working with students' life world contexts and knowledge.

Thus, Fataar and Feldman (2014) argued strongly for the use of a Funds of Knowledge approach. Funds of knowledge then, was put forward as a way of engaging students meaningfully in their learning. The PLC is argued as a safe, risk free, dialogical environment where the participating teachers are able to develop the conceptual capacity and intellectual skills to grow. These attributes, they claim, include a social justice approach to their classroom pedagogy which speaks to the heart of inclusivity and equity needed in our classrooms today.

There are key lessons to be learned from the discourse in this article. Advocates in the education profession such as Fataar and Feldman (2014) have conducted vast studies on Professional Learning Communities and the effects they have on teacher education and development. To these advocates, having firm PLCs in schools potentially will lead to several positive cultural changes that include increased peer learning, reduced teacher isolation, increased knowledge of effective strategies of teaching, higher teacher retention rates, job satisfaction and increased content knowledge (Feldman & Fataar, 2014). Moreover, these researchers postulate that there is significant correlation between the concept and gains in the learning of students and improvement in teacher practice.

Base on documented subjects discussed in this article on the potential positive impacts of PLC on improving teacher education and practice, I also learned that there is a need to conduct research on the issues in the Jamaican context or any other countries where PLC is to be implemented in the classroom. In order for these realities to be materialized in schools and classroom situations, there is the need for effective leadership and community outreach programs, for example, to reduce student absenteeism and decrease drop-out cases in our schools in Jamaica.

Making Meaning/Interpretation

What was most meaningful to me in this article was that Fataar and Feldman (2014) outlined different approaches to the development of pre-service student teachers' and practicing teacher’s professional knowledge of and for their practice, through PLC. These strategies, if implemented properly can reap fruit in our classroom. Our reason lies in the key position identified by Fataar and Feldman which is supported in the literature, which is the aspect of the theory-practice relationship.

These theory-practice relationships as educational experiences addressed in the article can enhance the growth and development of practitioners in developing their efficacy. These theory-practice relationships will enhance growth and development through: different theories of knowledge and skills transfer; assumptions about the type of expertise future teachers should possess and about 'what counts' as the knowledge underpinning the practice of teaching; and different
positions on the relationship between pedagogical knowledge and subject knowledge. On the other hand, in the article, we did not understand fully how Fataar and Feldman consider these various conceptualizations and assumptions influence curriculum thinking. Although these authors postulate that these aspects of theory-practice are linked primarily to contemporary debates and policy frameworks on teacher education in a jurisprudent outside of the Caribbean and South Africa, they should be able to be applied to the Jamaican context as we grapple with similar variables in our classrooms today. What we lack in Jamaica is the implementation and so a clearer direction is needed.

Another point worth noting or make meaning of is the fact that teachers are the curriculum implementers in the classroom. Thus, this can become either a constraining or transformative environment depending how much teachers are involved or equipped to deal with situations they encounter in their professional practice. In this article, Feldman and Fataar (2014) were inspired by Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. This is appropriated to illustrate the transformative potential of the teacher in the classroom. At this point, we would also like to mention Paulo Freire’s (1930-2002) problem-posing education which can be utilized to make meaning of the conceptualization of PLC as a safe space where teachers are free to make mistakes and grow. This is as it opens up the space for a dialogical encounter in the classroom. It follows then that teaching and education is dialogical by nature and can contribute towards social transformation. Debates about socio-scientific issues in the public domain require the skills that argumentation promotes and it is proposed that social justice pedagogy can make a contribution.

Feldman and Fataar (2014) in this article also conceptualized consideration of what could be regarded as pedagogical justice in schools. I wish to extend this further by combining Bourdieu’s social reproduction account of education with elements of Bernstein’s consideration of the internal dynamics that constitute the pedagogic relay. This is appropriate as Feldman and Fataar (2014) considers the pedagogical terms upon which professional learning communities can assist teachers in getting their students to become meaningfully engaged in their classroom activities and their schools. Such engagement, we suggest, must contend with the cultural resistance displayed by disadvantaged students, such as may exist in South Africa, the intended context of this seminal work, towards their schooling which they view as being against their class cultural interests. We face similar situations in Jamaican schools and so we are forced continuously to source alternative ways of reaching our youths in school.

It can be interpreted in this article that teachers' pedagogical practices in the school environment present a key space to leverage the socially just pedagogies necessary for productive school and teacher-students engagement. To this end, at this point we must pause to question conceptual bases upon which such a pedagogical approach can proceed. We truly value the advancement of the argument that student engagement ought to proceed on the basis of a combination of a 'social relations of pedagogies' orientation and an 'explicit pedagogic' approach to re-contextualization of work.

We find one of the main argument of this article that pedagogical justice for disadvantaged students lies in providing a pedagogical scaffold between their life world knowledge's and accessing the school knowledge codes very meaningful.
Such an approach supports students' school success. Feldman and Fataar (2014) argue for pedagogical incorporation of horizontal knowledge's central to securing active engagement with student schooling.

**Making Judgments/Evaluation**

Base on the documented subjects discussed in this article by Feldman and Fataar (2014) on the conceptualization and functioning of professional learning community, the potential positive impacts of PLC on improving teacher education and practice is quite evident. Therefore, we do see the educational experiences that are addressed in this article enhancing the growth and development of both pre-service and in-service teachers. These models and strategies when implemented in any school will help teachers to be open to new ideas and will become more open for other teachers to observe their classrooms and make suggestions. In addition, I see the educational experiences that are addressed in this article enhancing the growth and development as they allow us to focus on the goal of realizing increased learning that is equitably distributed. With Professional Learning Community focusing on teacher efficacy, the issues discussed, if we seek to address them in our work place, they will provide practical solution to smaller achievement of gaps between learners from different economic, social, and cultural backgrounds.

We must also point out that I am in full agreement that there is a need to conduct research in the Jamaican context on the issue to materialize any of the speculations in school and classroom situations today. Also, there is need to reduce student absenteeism and decrease drop-out cases to non-existent. Another critical issue gleaned from the article that I am in full support of is the fact that there is a need for more mentoring of teachers in our schools, especially the new ones. We must add though, that the task of preparing and supporting new teachers for working with students such as those diverse youth must be looked at seriously. Also, much of what we call mentoring in our educational practice falls short of equity- and diversity-focused work in a time when all teachers are called upon to differentiate instructions.

My opinion on the overall value of the article is that it is highly useful to both in-service and practicing teachers as the issues discussed are focused on getting teachers to the realization of increased learning that is equitably distributed. Even though equity is almost impossible to achieve, with an objective of Professional Learning Community on teacher efficacy, teachers will benefit from practical solutions to the problems we face in schools today. This article is also valuable as evidence on the relationship between teacher efficacy and the presence of Professional Learning Communities is scarce especially in Jamaica.

The audience that this article is appropriate for are teachers in practice and preservice teachers. This is because they must realize that the educational experiences that they will enjoy and appreciate are best practices. In light of this fact, these issues will prepare teachers to deal the challenges they will face in the classroom that requires them to tweak whatever they learned in practice. Additionally, there seems to be a mismatch between our training and practice and we also need to have our practices exemplify and grounded in practice.
Reference
