Professional Learning Communities: Reflections on Cases in Bahrain, Oman and the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

This chapter explores the different definitions and characteristics of international and regional research on a professional learning community (PLC) approach. The chapter discusses models of professional development that are used in international educational systems then it reflects on possible ways for adopting these models in the educational context in Bahrain, Oman and The United Arab Emirates. A focus on the educational context in the countries is included with recommendations for the implications thereof on policy and practice. This chapter has two parts: the first is a literature review that synthesizes key ideas, research, and results in the field of PLCs. The chapter thereby is connecting to ideas from a socio-material practice perspective in the field of workplace learning. This results in a focus on professional responsibility, accountability and experience. The second part includes two detailed cases that illustrate how PLCs are translated into learning and teaching practice in two private
schools in Bahrain and Oman, and a third case reflecting on PLC initiatives in The United Arab Emirates.

The chapter recommends promoting a PLC approach in educational systems in the Gulf Council Countries (GCC) and globally by focusing on the following practical implementations: expanding its use in pre- and in-service teacher training programs, adapting PLCs’ best international practices to the localized educational context, preparing school principals to lead PLCs in their schools, providing human and financial support to these communities, and working on changing school cultures to become more collaborative by using initiatives such as coaching. A shortage of studies about PLCs, specifically in the GCC region, may lead to a limited spread of improved professional teaching practices applied in GCC schools and the wider network of schools associated with GCC schools. This chapter highlights the importance of a PLC approach and provides examples of how this approach is being used. We suggest that other practitioners, school leaders and researchers may benefit by embracing a PLC approach for increased professional teaching practice, subsequent learner success and improved organizational education outcomes.

Keywords: Teaching practice, teacher professional development, educational policies, PLCs in practice

Introduction

Recently, research on and development of frameworks for teachers’ professional development and practices experienced a paradigm shift. This shift was driven by the complexities of teaching and learning requirements, an increased necessity for reforming educational systems, an increased need for accountability and assuring quality learning and teaching outcomes (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). The main feature of these approaches is that they shift professional development beyond merely focusing on a teacher’s basic attainment
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Dr Beatrix Henkel is a Creative Learning Expert who has been working in the field of education for almost 20 years in roles that varied from classroom teacher to leadership training lead. Dr Henkel has a bachelor’s and a master’s degree in English language teaching and her PhD research project focused on second/foreign language motivation. She worked in multiple educational contexts, including Hungary, USA, Oman, UAE and is currently employed by the Ministry of Education in the UAE. Dr Henkel is also the founder of R.A.C.E. and the owner of Vision_BH (a collaboration-based company providing creative learning solutions). Her areas of expertise include, but are not limited to leadership coaching, learner autonomy, self-leadership, language learning and instructional design.
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Marissa Green is from the USA. She obtained her Bachelor of Science Degree, in Education from the Franciscan University of Steubenville in 1999. Over the past two decades, she has worked in the USA and GCC for the Educational Sector.