

The Role of Professional Learning Communities for Teacher Innovation: A Comparative Study in Beijing and Hong Kong

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Abstract

This research explores how Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) influence teacher innovation and how the context factors differ the impact. Innovation on the part of teachers, which means implementing innovative ideas raised by teachers, has been a fashion over the last decades. Teachers as innovators could increase the successful possibility of schools' educational practice improvement because of teachers' professional judgment and knowledge engagement. The teachers' learning is essential for the success of innovation, while PLCs are accepted to be an effective way by the schools and educational institutions for sustaining professional learning with the collective purpose of improving the students' performance. Social capital theory serves as the theoretical framework to guide this research. By semi-structured interviews with 94 teachers and school leaders, PLCs will foster teacher innovation by 1) mutual trust and respect to provide foundation; 2) shared practice and knowledge to provide source of inspiration; 3) peer collaboration to provide feasibility; 4) shared responsibility to provide guarantee. Compared with Beijing, Hong Kong is easier to promote teacher innovation through PLCs because of the relatively diverse admission pathways and low power distance. However, the low in-group collectivism will limit teacher innovation because of weak peer collaboration. This research provides guidance for teachers and school leaders on what they can do during PLCs to promote teacher innovation.

Keywords: Culture Difference, Dimensions of PLCs, School Change, Teacher Learning, Teacher Unions and Innovation