Factors Affecting the Progression of Schools as Professional Learning Communities: a Multi-case Study of Canadian French-language Elementary Schools

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Presentation Outline

1. Issue
2. Theoretical Framework
3. Methodology
4. Results
5. Discussion
6. Conclusion

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1. Issue

• Academic success = the greatest challenge facing education
• Must re-evaluate how schools operate
• Work environment: teachers are isolated from each other
• Teachers depend on their colleagues to overcome existing challenges

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1. Issue

• Professional Learning Community (DuFour & Eaker, 2004)
  - Collaboration
  - Deliberations aimed at a continuous improvement in the academic success of students

• Powerful tool for professional development (Butler, 2005).
1. Issue

- Research-based consensus attained:
  - Positive influence of PLC approach on improvement of student learning
- Factors determining take up of this type of functioning are not well known
- Francophone environment: has only recently started to show an interest
- Anglophone environment: where most of the research has been done to date
Goal

• Review of professional learning communities in six elementary French-language schools in Canada having reached different stages in their progression as a PLC

• To seek an understanding of the factors behind the acceptance and the progression of this type of functioning
Questions

• How do we encourage teachers to adopt this type of functioning?
• Are certain factors more prominent in one or more of the three stages of progression of the PLC (Leclerc, Moreau & Lépine, 2009)?
• How can we motivate a school to progress as a PLC?
Specific Objectives

1. Identify the factors that influence operating as a PLC in elementary French-language schools

2. Analyze the links that exist between these factors and the level of progression of PLCs in these schools
2. Theoretical Framework

• Five dimensions of a PLC (Hord, 1997, 2004):
  – Shared leadership
  – Shared vision and values (commitment towards student success)
  – Collective learning of the teaching staff in response to student needs
  – Peer evaluation of strategies (culture of inquiry, feedback, interaction, co-construction)
  – Human and physical conditions
2. Theoretical Framework

• Stages of development (Cate, J. M., Vaughn, C., & O'hair, M. J. (2006).
  1. Primary characteristics of a PLC: sharing most effective practices and developing confidence
  2. Team has matured: shared leadership, questioning in teaching methods based on student learning data
2. Theoretical Framework

• Dibbon, D. (2000), Diagnosing the extent of organizational learning capacity in schools
Evolution of Schools: PLC

- Vision
- Physical and human conditions
- Collaborative culture
- Leadership
- Dissemination of expertise and shared learning
- Topics addressed
- Decision-making and use of data
Progression of Schools: PLC

Initiation stage (level 1)

- Vision of the school is rarely shared
- Informal exchanges
- Inefficient collaborative meetings
- Environment does not favour collaboration
- Teachers have the role of implementing static curriculum
- Work in an isolated manner
- Multiple topics are addressed, with no links
- Little data to support decisions

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Progression of Schools : PLC

Implementation stage (level 2)

- Shared vision and multiple priorities
- Collaborative meetings, but structure does not permit efficient exchanges
- Efforts of collaboration but preoccupations with logistics and management (timetable, supply teachers)
- Support between colleagues in a selective or unidirectional manner
- Shared leadership between teachers of the same grade level
- Teachers give their opinion but principal makes final decision
Progression of Schools : PLC

Integration stage (level 3)

- Clear shared vision and targeted priorities
- Quality time for formal meetings
- Efficient structure during meetings; group is able to manage itself
- Culture of collaboration and constructive criticism
- Shared leadership: expert teachers
- Meetings aimed at improving student learning
- Collective learning by teaching staff
- Topics chosen, based on preoccupations linked to student learning
- Decisions based on proof (precise data)
- Complex analysis for questioning the impact of interventions

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3. Methodology
This research has three phases

1) Describe the stages in the progression of a PLC using seven indicators selected from relevant PLC literature

2) Identify the means that will support the school’s progression within this type of environment and the active roles that the school’s administration must assume

3) Identify the links between the factors and the stage of progression of the school as a PLC
3. Methodology: phase III

- Paradigm of interpretative research
- Multi-case studies
- Six schools:
  - 2 at the initiation stage
  - 2 at the implementation stage
  - 2 at the integration stage

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3. Methodology: Participants

- N=45
- 6 principals and 39 teachers
- Junior and senior kindergarten, grades one, two and three
- Initiation stage: n=17
- Implementation stage: n=14
- Integration stage: n=14
3. Methodology:
Data collection instruments

- Semi-directed interviews: 45
- Group interviews
- Observation
- Documentation analysis
Factors by stage of progression of the school as a PLC

**INITIATION (1)**
- Clearly defined expectations and vision
- Structured meetings
- Administration: presence and guidance
- Culture of collaboration

**IMPLEMENTATION (2)**
- Administration: focused inquiries
- Model

**INTEGRATION (3)**
- Leadership of teachers
- Advanced monitoring of student achievement
- Demanding options for teacher development

Time
Support
Follow-up
Encouragement
Involvement of teachers in decision making

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5. Discussion: Conditions that promote progression of school as a PLC

- Counter the isolation of teachers
  - Time
    - Practical timetable
      - Proximity of classrooms
- Strive for student success
  - Shared vision
  - Effective structure for meetings
  - Culture of inquiry in relation to student learning
  - Culture of collaboration
- Create mechanisms that promote teacher training
  - Sharing of practices and peer evaluations
  - Problem resolution and a culture of inquiry
  - Classroom observations and peer evaluations
- Redistribute leadership within schools
  - Rethink the roles of teachers
  - Reconsider the roles of school administrators

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Conclusion

• The research provided
  – a better understanding of the factors influencing PLCs
  – an appreciation of the differences between schools

• The crucial factors in the initiation and implementation stages

• Schools operating in a more traditional hierarchy = more difficulty in adapting to a form of distributed pedagogical leadership associated with a PLC

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Conclusion

• Teachers will have to develop a new image of their role
• Must rethink the roles of school administrators
• More research is required:
  – analyze the specificity of the dynamics of collaboration within PLCs
  – Document the different forms by which distributed pedagogical leadership associated with working as a PLC are manifested

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