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PLC in effective and less effective case study schools in Jamaica

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- Educational policy landscape in Jamaica is in a state of flux
 - a) 2004 Task Force Report on Educational Reform
 - b) The Educational System Transformation Programme (ESPT): “currently at the tail end of the full implementation of Task Force Report”
 - 6 new institutions have been added to the

landscape



Research Aims

The research aims to critically interrogate how leadership is practised in select effective and less effective high schools in Jamaica.



Research Questions

- a) What are the leadership practices evident among secondary school principals in the sample?
- b) How do leadership behaviours and practices compare and contrast among schools with different track record of performance in Caribbean Examination Council (CSEC)?
- c) What do principals in high-achieving traditional high schools do differently than principals in lower-achieving traditional high schools and how might this explain differences achievement?



Author/Date	Professional Learning Community (PLC) conceptualization
Wong (2010, p.133)	Professional learning community is self-perpetuating, shapes its own values and norms, results in the (a) re-culturing of the school community by reshaping the existing values and cultures and resolving problems such as teacher isolation and individualism; (b) they exist on a continuum from beginning, evolving to mature; (c) Category wise, they can be strong or weak and subdivided into mature, developing, fragmented and static
Marks & Louis (1997)	PLCs have four (5) dimensions: shared norms and values; a focus on student learning; collaborative activity; de-privatisation of practice; and reflective dialogue
Hord (1997)	<i>Learning communities</i> are variously conceptualised as: (1) the act of extending classroom practice to community; (2) utilising community resources, both material and human; (3) bringing community personnel into the school to enhance the curriculum and learning task for students; and (4) having students, teachers, and administrators reciprocally engaged in learning
Hord (1998)	PLCs are characterised by supportive and shared leadership; collective learning and application of learning; shared values and vision; supportive conditions; and shared

Findings and interpretations

There is overwhelming literature on the benefits of professional learning communities: they encourage collaboration among teachers and the sharing of ideas which may lead to improved classroom practice and increased student learning

We know little of the sinister effect on schooling that may result when PLC becomes warped or the “darker side” of PLC as Professor Alma Harris terms it



Findings: less effective high school

When PLCs are implemented by school administrators with little or no teacher consultation they become counterproductive

Instead of “progressive pedagogic orientation, where learning is emergent from teacher engagement in reflexive dialogues about professional roles in the school environment (Lee & Lee, 2013, p.444)”

There was a ‘silo effect’: teachers were asked to sit together in ‘learning centres’.

Findings: effective case study school

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Teacher leaders made frequent reference to their interdependence;

They characterised their working relationships as collegial and collaborative without making explicit reference to professional learning community.



The best of both worlds: teachers are able to have enriching conversations about their practice yet have the professional autonomy to plan lesson reflecting their own classroom realities – they are empowered.

Teachers in this school enjoy a collegial relation with colleagues: “cooperative, and interdependent” (Barth, 1986) and illustrated by the following four behaviours:

- (1) frequent and continuous discussion of the practice of teaching and learning and in concrete and precise terms;
- (2) observing each other teaching and administrating;
- (3) working on the curriculum together by planning, designing, researching, and evaluating; and
- (4) teaching each other what they know about teaching, learning, and leading (pp. 473-474).



.... And it's a culture of people wanting to support each other as well. Especially teachers support each other. So I hear of other schools, for example, where there is great rivalries within departments, teachers teaching the same subjects and they are fighting each other, the rivalry... and the hiding of information, not sharing and stuff like that. That was one of the things that struck me when I came, too, was that people just share; you could ask anybody advice for anything, whether it's content, whether its procedures, you could just asked around and you could get help from other colleagues and so that is something that stood out for me: that kind of collegial relationship (Science HOD, effective school).

and:

Lesson plans are done individually in my department, there is a lot of talk about what we are doing before. So a lot of it is informal conversation: So somebody will say, 'I'm teaching so and so, what did you do with it?' And so there is collaboration in terms of communicating ideas and also activities: people will say, "So how do you do so and so? Did you act... did you get them to do whatever?' But then the actual recording of the lesson plan is individual in the department (English HOD, effective school).

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