

The Path Exploration on English Teachers' Professional Development from the Perspective of Learning Community

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Abstract: Teachers' professional development, as an important role in educational reform, is getting more and more attention. Learning community is one of the most effective ways to promote teachers' professional development. Teachers' learning communities are beneficial to stimulating teachers' subject consciousness of professional development, providing resources for teachers' professional development, and improving teachers' practical wisdom. This paper aims to analyze learning community and try to explore the construction and path of English teachers' learning communities. Some strategies are put forward: develop a Shared Vision; create cooperative school culture; establish a developmental evaluation system.

Keywords: English teachers, teachers' professional development, learning community

1. Introduction

As China's education steps into a new phase of pursuing high-quality development, higher requirements have been put forward for teachers. How to effectively improve the overall level of teachers has become a major practical problem faced by primary and secondary schools. As an important guarantee for improving the quality of education, teachers' professional development plays an important role in education reform. Teachers' learning communities, as one of the most effective ways to promote teachers' professional development, can not only provide a platform for teachers to strengthen their own learning in a community way, but also enable teachers to generate their teaching knowledge and practical wisdom through joint exploration and discussion, so as to achieve their own professional development. Actually, teachers' professional development is both a continuous problem-solving process and a lifelong learning process, which is not only individual and independent, but also social and group. As Thomas G. pointed out that an important shift in thinking about teacher professional development is the focus from professional individualism to learning communities ^[1]. Within teachers' learning communities, teachers share a common vision and feel the meaning of interaction. Through the interaction of equality and cooperation, teachers receive professional growth and development, and the quality of teaching is further improved. This paper aims to analyze the connotation and the value of teachers' learning communities, and tries to propose some strategies to achieve English teachers' professional development from the perspective of teachers' learning communities.

2. Teachers' Learning Community

2.1. Connotation of Learning Community

The term "community" was first proposed as a sociological concept by the famous German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies in 1887. Tönnies believed that a community refers to a social group with a common sense of belonging, which is formed through a certain positive relationship and functions uniformly both internally and externally. The community is divided into blood community, geographical community, and spiritual community, emphasizing the sense of belonging and identity of the participants, as well as the emotional agreement on the basis of mutual understanding ^[2].

The term "learning community" was put forward for the first time by Boyer in 1995. Boyer believed that a learning community is an organization in which all people learn together with a common mission

vision. People in this organization share an interest in learning, and jointly explore how to approach knowledge and how the world works by interacting and participating together towards the same goal of education^[3].

Jocelyn viewed a learning community as a double-loop learning process from goal to process^[4]. Roland S. Bart considered a learning community as a place where members of the organization actively learn and promote each other according to their own priorities. Myers & Simpson pointed out that each member is a complete individual, who is stated in the cultural atmosphere of learning and responsible for the interests of the learning community. Zhong Zhixian believed that a learning community refers to a learning method in which members rely on each other to explore, communicate and collaborate, with the purpose of completing real tasks and problems^[5].

It can be seen from the above opinions that the definition of learning community has different definitions according to different analysis perspectives. In conclusion, a teachers' learning community is a community organized by specialized teachers with common visions or goals, in an environment of equality and freedom, to solve agonizingly difficult problems in teaching through various ways, to improve students' learning effects better, and to learn continuously in the process, to win professional growth.

2.2. Characteristics of Teachers' Learning Community

Firstly, teachers' learning communities are self-organizing. Teachers' professional development is not passive or forced, but a process in which individual teachers consciously and actively reform themselves based on their career development aspirations and the pursuit of life values^[6]. Teachers' learning communities are organized by teachers who share common goals, preferences, and interests. It is a system constructed through active relationships and different components function in unity.

Secondly, teachers' learning communities are situational. The mode of teachers' professional development cannot be set in stone, and the approach must incorporate the real needs of teachers' professional development effectively. External social contexts, teachers' own professional knowledge, and learning activities are important drivers of teacher development. And the effective implementation of these learning activities requires interaction, communication, and reflection among teachers.

Thirdly, teachers' learning communities are cooperative. The apparent advantages of cooperation are feedback and resource sharing, which is helpful for teachers to obtain new knowledge and information could through dialogue and exchanges with others^[7]. The communities take learning as their core and teamwork as their basic operation form. The formation of teachers' learning communities is based on groups, in which members communicate and cooperate with each other, breaking mistrust and isolated state.

2.3. Types of Teachers' Learning Community

Some scholars have classified teachers' learning communities into the following four different types according to their attributes: mature professional learning communities, developing professional learning communities, segmented professional learning communities, and static professional learning communities. Among the four types of teachers' learning communities, the establishment of mature and developing professional learning communities is the development goal. Mature or developing learning communities could provide sufficient conditions for teachers to achieve high-quality professional development. On the contrary, fragmented or static learning communities have little benefit for teachers' development, which remains the problem of individualism and isolation of teachers.

2.4. Modes of Teachers' Learning Community

In order to give full play to the radiating role of the core teachers in teaching and achieve the purpose of sharing resources and improving teaching efficiency, more and more teachers' learning communities are being built^[8]. Generally, there are two models of teachers' learning communities. One is the school-based teaching and learning research model, which refers to educational and pedagogical research based on the school's own resource strengths and characteristics, with the school's teachers as the main research subjects, emphasizing research around the school's own problems and improving school practice. The other is the joint university-primary and secondary school model, which is a partnership between universities and primary and secondary schools, using university experts as resources to partner with primary and secondary school teachers in a joint effort to improve the quality and level of teaching and

learning in primary and middle schools.

3. The Value of Learning Community in English Teachers' Professional Development

3.1. To Stimulate Teachers' Subject Consciousness of Professional Development

Teachers' professional development is essentially the autonomous professional development of the subject in which the teacher dominates and controls his or her own essential power in the relationship between the subject and the object, and chooses the object and its direction of development ^[9]. The establishment of a learning community means that teachers should get out of their "self" and engage in equal interactions and dialogues with other teachers, so that they can construct a structure full of professional self-consciousness and a unique cultural atmosphere. In learning communities, teachers discuss the common theme and share professional knowledge and practical experience with each other. Through interaction, the conscious pursuit of their own professions is stimulated, the desire for professional development is awakened, the initiative, autonomy, and enthusiasm for teachers' professional development are greatly mobilized, and also stimulate their sense of mission and responsibility. Teachers' learning communities are not only beneficial to the improvement of teachers' basic professional knowledge and teaching skills, but also promote the accumulation of teachers' energy, which includes their psychological self-efficacy, the generation of practical knowledge, and the ability to reflect and create. On the path of teachers' professional development, the learning community provides a supportive environment for teaching, which makes it easier for teachers to gain a sense of self-identity and belonging. In this way, the learning ability that maintains the continuous growth of teachers' professional development is also enhanced.

3.2. To Provide Resources for Teachers' Professional Development

Teachers' professional development is an ongoing process during which teachers keep learning, develop and accumulate practical knowledge. Learning communities provide a variety of interactive opportunities, where whether novice teachers, experienced teachers, or expert teachers can share each other's views and experiences through interaction, and enrich their knowledge system ^[10]. In the process, teachers promote their own characteristic education system. They do not completely absorb the experience of others, but take the essence and get rid of the dross, absorb suitable knowledge and experience, and reorganize with their own original knowledge system. As highly permeable and interactive organizational entities, learning communities can provide opportunities for teachers to engage in social learning. Through the interactive partnership, they can recognize that they are learning in a community and they are able to feel the value and meaning of the community. In terms of the actual situation, there are obvious differences among teachers in terms of knowledge structure, intelligence level, thinking style, cognitive style, teaching content processing, teaching method selection, and overall teaching design. Because of these differences, teachers themselves have abundant and valuable resources to share with each other. As teachers construct knowledge and meaning, the community can facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and understanding and the sharing of knowledge. In this way, the increase of collective knowledge and the increase of individual knowledge influence each other and promote each other, realizing the complementary of knowledge and experience and the collision of thinking and wisdom. Thus, the use of educational resources could be maximized, knowledge sharing could be realized, and valuable educational knowledge and experience could be inherited.

3.3. To Improve Teachers' Practical Wisdom

Teachers' knowledge consists of explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Compared with explicit knowledge, tacit knowledge is known for its indeterminate and unsystematic ways of acquiring, but it plays an important role in teaching practice ^[11]. The transformation between the two different forms of knowledge is not a natural thing. In teaching practice, some teachers can handle many emergencies quickly without thinking too much, which is the result of practical wisdom. As a learning method, learning community provides teachers with the opportunity to observe and learn the teaching skills of each other and apply them to their own teaching practice, developing their teaching wisdom in the long-term accumulation process. For one thing, teachers share their insights and opinions to achieve a deeper understanding of learning content and engage in collaborative activities with their peers, which involve negotiation, presentation of their knowledge, interdependence, and responsibility. For another thing, the community transforms individual problems into communal problems and solves individual dilemmas

through collective wisdom through interaction, thus constituting a virtuous circle that accelerates individual intellectual learning and practical innovation. As Michael Fullan put forward in his book that when teachers sit together with their students in schools to study students' learning situation, when they make connections between student achievement and how they teach, and when they gain insights from colleagues and other external good experiences to further improve their own teaching practices ^[12]. Through conversation and activity exploration, teachers transform public knowledge into personal knowledge, so that they can develop practical wisdom and realize professional development.

3.4. To Develop Teachers' Sense of Cooperation and Team Spirit

For a long time, teachers' professional development has been limited by the lack of communication and cooperation. Firstly, teachers are unwilling to take the initiative to strengthen communication and sharing, seek help from others, or actively participate in collaborative organizations. Secondly, teachers tend to show a passive attitude in teaching and researching cooperation. Therefore, teachers' work has been in an isolated and closed state in the daily teaching activities. The construction of teachers' learning communities has had an impact on the school's original solid management model. The original inherent rules and regulations have been replaced by a common development vision. And teachers are willing to participate in mutual reflection, consultation and cooperation, instead of being isolated, closed, or competitive. Thus, a flat power relationship and a partnership of mutual cooperation could be formed, giving teachers full professional autonomy and stimulating the motivation of teachers to participate in school improvement ^[13]. The establishment of learning communities not only creates a multi-win situation with mutual benefits and complementary advantages among teachers, but also helps to create a relaxing environment to enhance communication among teachers. It encourages the collision of different teaching ideas and the blossoming of different teaching styles, and overcomes the phenomenon of closed confrontation among teachers. Therefore, the meaning of teacher professionalism is not only limited to the development of individual expertise and teaching skills, but also requires individual professionals to work together in a group to enhance their individual development potential through "team focus" in order to reach success together.

4. The Construction and Path of English Teachers' Learning Communities

4.1. Develop a Shared Vision

A good learning community is not simply a group of teachers working or learning for a task or goal, but rather a shared and collaborative organization. The shared vision points to the desired results or objects of the community, and guides the further development and planning process of the community. A shared vision is a combination of individual vision and group vision, while a shared vision is based on individual vision. At present, many teachers are forced to accept various complicated arrangements under the pressure of school administration, and gradually lose their self-pursuit. As a result, teachers rarely devote themselves to school development. Therefore, when forming the shared vision of the teachers' learning communities, it is necessary to fully consider the needs of individual teachers. A deeply rooted shared vision is helpful to unite members, promote learning and development among teachers, form a strong sense of organizational belonging and cultural identity, and provide teachers with a driving force for continuous change. The English course is characterized by the integration of instrumentality and humanity, and the ultimate goals of the English curriculum are to cultivate and develop students' subject core competencies which include language ability, cultural awareness, thinking capacity, and learning ability. Therefore, the shared vision of the learners in the English teachers' learning communities should be to help students achieve the development goals of the core competencies.

4.2. Create Cooperative School Culture

A good learning community requires teachers to cooperate actively with each member. A harmonious, open, and dynamic learning community should be established among teachers, in which the professional development of themselves and the group can be achieved through the exchange and sharing of experience among the members. Different teachers have different teaching abilities, teaching methods, teaching experience, and other professional levels, and their perspectives on issues are also different. In this way, mutual cooperation will undoubtedly broaden teachers' personal thinking and reconstruct teachers' own knowledge and experience system. School culture refers to the unique cohesive school outlook, institutional norms, and school spiritual atmosphere that school subjects have developed

throughout school life, the core of which are the common values formed in the long-term operation of the school. School culture influences everything that happens in the school and affects the professional development of the teacher community. Therefore, school culture should be given an important place in the process of English teachers' professional development. Teachers' learning communities is an ecologically oriented model of teachers' professional development that focuses on the culture, community, collaboration, and context of teachers from a more macro perspective. Thus, better implementation of this model of professional development requires the construction of collaborative school culture. To build an ideal teachers' learning community, members must be democratic and equal, trust each other, and encourage cooperation. At the same time, the school management should emphasize flexibility and humanity, equality and tolerance, from management to guidance, from intervention to dredging, and create a free, relaxed, and open environment for teachers. of the community.

4.3. Establish a Developmental Evaluation System

A good learning community calls for developmental evaluation system. The developmental evaluation system, which aims to promote teachers' professional development, is a formative evaluation based on goals, emphasizing the process, providing timely feedback, and promoting development, and advocates a relaxed environment to promote teachers' conscious and active development, so as to achieve their individual development goals and their own values. It is also important for building teachers' learning communities. Developmental teacher evaluation emphasizes teachers' self-evaluation, self-motivation, and future development; it focuses on promoting active participation of all teachers; it enables all teachers to share their success by expanding communication channels; it emphasizes the motivation and participation of all teachers, and the evaluation of community members. Due to the similarity in education and teaching goals, methods, and processes as well as educational objects and teaching environments, community members have deeper empathy and a more accurate understanding of teachers' work, so community member evaluation is an important learning and communication opportunity, and teachers can obtain a lot of valuable information and experiences from community member evaluation, which is very useful for improving education and teaching as well as self-development.

5. Conclusion

As an effective way for teachers' professional development, teachers' learning communities are characterized by openness, diversity, autonomy, and interaction. As members share a common vision and goals, they form a relationship of trust, respect, equality, and cooperation with each other. Communities break down the barriers between teachers and disciplines and expand teachers' research horizons. The creation of a collaborative culture in teacher learning communities is an important contribution to the formation and development of a collaborative culture on the campus as a whole. As the experience of building teacher learning communities matures, the development of teacher learning communities will become increasingly mature and will gradually become the mainstream model of teacher professional development.

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