

Learning Circles: Promoting Collaborative Learning Culture for Teacher Professional Development

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Abstract

This case study examined Palestinian English language teachers' views of the implementation of learning circles (LCs) and their impact on instructional practices and on promoting a collaborative learning culture for teacher professional development. These learning circles involved designated English language teachers teaching from fifth to tenth grade coming together twice a month for six hours during the one year leadership and teacher development program (LTD) to reflect on and share their insights, experiences, difficulties and challenges as leaders of change. Learning circles in the LTD program aimed at providing powerful opportunities for growth and professional development. The data sources included semi-structured interviews, observation and analysis of teacher participation, presentations and reflections. The data also included several sub-questions that this study set out to be answered and explored by the teachers orally and through emails. A total of forty Palestinian teachers participated in this study. Half of the teachers were from Ramallah district and half from Qabatyia-Palestine. The results of this study were a narrative description of teachers' views of the implementation of learning circles used to impact their instructional practices and their professional development. The data from the interviews and the observation of teachers' participation and presentations suggested that teachers have positive views towards learning circles that support and positively affect their instructional practices and professional development. Teachers' reflection revealed that LCs refined their teaching practices and encouraged them to create a collaborative culture that often leads to professional development. They helped them explore new methods and techniques to advance their professional practices. Through learning circles, English language teachers share their best practices in a safe, supportive and collaborative environment.

KeyWords: Culture of collaboration, learning circles, learning communities, professional development, teacher expertise