FOSTERING COLLEGIALITY AMONG TEACHERS: TOWARDS ENHANCING TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The success of a school depends on effective administration and leadership as well as close relationships between and among teachers. The Ministry of Education (MOE) Malaysia, currently emphasizes the achievement of excellence in education, which includes according recognition towards high performing schools and rewarding teachers for outstanding performance. This emphasis then translates to each member in schools having to work closely to achieve the status of a successful school. One way of attaining close working relationships is through fostering collegiality among teachers. This paper will firstly give insights to the concepts of collegiality based on the different school scenarios as proposed by Glickman (2004). It will then proceed to discuss the benefits and characteristics of collegiality and finally conclude with suggestions as to how teachers can best foster collegiality in their schools.

Key words: Collegiality, collaboration, teachers’ professional development, successful schools.

INTRODUCTION

Recent developments in education suggest that collegiality among teachers may result in substantive school improvement (Barth, 2001; DuFour, 2004) and that a high level of collegiality among staff members is associated with successful and effective schools (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Grossen and Anduson, 1995).

As such, the questions to ask are; what is collegiality and why is collegiality important in school improvement and in enhancing teachers’ professional development?

The following school scenarios as described by Glickman et al (2004) will help to clarify the meaning of collegiality and its relationship to successful schools.
School A

- Students mixing around.
- Teachers are happy, socializing with each other even during class time.
- Staff room filled with laughter.
- Teachers given freedom to use diverse methods.
- Most teachers in front of the class, teaching, asking questions, assigning work.
- Some teachers allow students to work alone in small groups.
- Teachers observed once a year.
- One monthly staff meeting.

School B

- A few students outside the class.
- Students seated in the classroom.
- Teachers busy teaching.
- Desks in rows, the teacher is in front.
- During recess, not many teachers in staff room.
- Most teachers remain in the classroom, either alone or with another teacher.
- Teachers have to submit record books weekly.
- HM visits classrooms frequently.
- In the classroom, students are generally quiet and attentive. Those who are not, are disciplined.

School C

- Conducive climate.
- During recess, many teachers in staff room:
  - Engaged in social interaction.
  - Some teachers spend time preparing lessons.
  - Other teachers discuss teaching and learning.
- In classroom,
  - Interaction between teachers and students.
  - Students engaged in active learning.
- In addition,
  - Supervision carried out by HM and other teachers, mentoring and coaching.
  - After school, a group of teachers discuss action research.

Discussion based on the three schools

School A: Congenial School

- Friendly, sociable and cordial atmosphere that suits everyone’s needs and everybody gets along with one another.

School B: Conventional School

- Following rules and regulations with a formal working environment. Professional isolation with little interaction among teachers.
School C: Collegial School

- There exist purposeful interactions.
- Spirit of togetherness, teachers getting along together and working towards a common goal.
- Promotion of professional practice where teachers work together to improve teaching and learning; discussing work-related matters and make educational decisions to improve students’ learning.

Based on the above discussion on the three different schools, it can be concluded that if schools were to succeed and teachers were to enhance their professional development, there needs to be a move or shift from being congenial or conventional towards being more collegial. Hence it is important to foster collegiality among teachers as teachers are the main players in the school system. Thus, teachers have to practice and foster collegiality as a means towards enhancing their professional development as well as raising the status of their schools.

As suggested by Fullan (2001), collegial relationship among teachers is a prerequisite for school improvement and there is a need to make knowledge sharing and innovative practice possible.

DEFINING COLLEGIALITY

Collegiality generally refers to the relationship between colleagues where each member respects one another and are committed to work towards a common goal.

Madiha Shah (2011) defined collegiality as the cooperative relationship among colleagues while Barth (1990) defined collegiality as what happens when educators work collaboratively with colleagues.

Kelchtermans (2006), defined collegiality as the quality of the relationships among staff members in a school. Often, the term comes with a positive value, referring to “good” (supportive, stimulating, rewarding, equal/democratic) relationships among equals. The actual actions of working together are determined by the quality of the relationships among staff members.

COLLEGIALITY IN SCHOOLS

Little (1982) provides an interesting operational definition of collegiality in schools:

1. Adults in school talk about practice i.e. teaching and learning.
2. Adults in school observe one another in the practice of teaching and administrating.
3. Adults engage together in working on the curriculum by planning, designing, researching and evaluating.
4. Adults in school teach each other what they know about teaching, learning and leading. Craft knowledge is revealed, articulated and shared.
Glickman (2004) further pointed that collegial schools:

1. Establish learning goals for all students consistent with the responsibility of education in a democratic society.
2. Frequently discuss teaching and learning.
3. Set common priorities.
4. Make decisions about internal changes and resources, allocations and assess effects on students’ learning.

According to McLaughlin and Talbert (2001), collegiality greatly impacts teachers’ morale, happiness and satisfaction. A collegial school environment is one in which teachers are able to:

- Work well with others
- Work well with administrators
- Manage conflict with others, including other teachers, administrators, parents and students.
- Match their educational strengths and preferences with an appropriate school.

**BENEFITS OF COLLEGIALITY**

The review of the literature indicates that collegiality relates to teachers’ professional development. According to Harris & Anthony (2001), a central theme underlying many of the current attempts to promote teacher development has been the notion that collaboration and collegiality contribute to teachers’ growth (p.372). Other writers such as Darling-Hammond and McLeigh (1995), Hargreaves (1994) as cited in Harris (2001), state that collegiality has come to be viewed as a critical feature of effective development efforts.

In addition, Little (1982), suggests that collegiality has the following benefits towards teachers’ professional development:

- Productivity
  - Motivation and new ideas.
- Professional development
  - Professional relationship.
  - Refinement of instruction.
  - Improved teaching
- Self-improvement
  - Increase capacity for change and improvement.

According to Kelchtermann (2006) collegial relations constitute an important working condition for teachers and as such they influence the professional development of teachers and schools.
Thus, from the review of the literature, it can be summarized that collegiality will benefit schools in enhancing teachers’ professional development. Collegiality will result in teachers working together in harmony towards a common goal, resulting in:

- Development in curriculum development and practices.
- Teaching and learning.
- Instructional materials development.
- Assessment of students.
- Increase in capacity for change.
- Exchange of ideas and expertise.
- Increase in work productivity.
- Increase in school performance.
- Promotion of successful schools.
- Openness towards collaboration with other schools or partners i.e. universities, corporate bodies. Etc.

FOSTERING COLLEGIALITY AMONG TEACHERS

The following are suggestions to promote collegiality among teachers, both novice or new teachers as well as experienced teachers.

**New Teachers**

To foster collegiality, new teachers must take the initiative to learn and to adapt to the school environment and culture by:

1. Taking the first step to introduce themselves to their senior colleagues.
2. Willing to ask questions if they face any difficulties relating to teaching and learning.
3. Seeking information from the respective departments in schools.
4. Volunteering to cooperate in various activities organized by the school.
5. Willing to be appointed to any responsible position, such as being committee members and participating in extra curricular activities such as social activities etc.
6. Willing to be involved in orientation programs organized by the school.
7. Participating in community service such as helping the poor, etc.
8. Getting involved in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).
9. Willing to function as advisor to students’ projects, activities, etc.
10. Being a role model for students by portraying good and positive characters.
11. Seeking out experienced teachers to be mentors.
Experienced teachers

Collegiality can be fostered by experienced teachers via the following actions:

1. Organizing orientation program to assist new teachers to get adjusted and accustomed to the actual school life, norm and culture.
2. Providing a supportive and positive working environment.
3. Acting as a role model for new teachers.
5. Organizing professional development activities.
6. Demonstrating a good character.
7. Organizing social activities and functions which involve all teachers.
8. Conducting workshops or sharing sessions with colleagues.
9. Forming and joining Special Interest Groups (SIG).
10. Working together to develop instructional materials, texts, etc.
11. Giving and sharing information from the MOE, JPN. PPD, school.
10. Acknowledge the expertise of other teachers.
11. Sharing information about students.
12. Creating a structure for teachers to observe one another.
13. Rewarding collegiality at the end of the year and acknowledging teachers working with collegiality as an encouragement.

CONCLUSION

Collegiality is a powerful tool in teachers’ professional, personal and social development. In addition, due to their large number in schools compared to other personnel, teachers are the major players in determining the success of their schools. This can be achieved through a cooperative, collaborative and collegial relationships between and among teachers. It is thus recommended that teachers work together to foster collegiality as a means to enhance their professional development and continue to work together towards the success of their schools.
REFERENCES


