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A Critical Analysis of Networked Learning Communities in an Asian Singapore Education Context: Implications on School Leadership

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After the successful implementation of the professional learning community (PLC) initiative in the Singapore education system, which started from 2009 (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012), the education ministry sets its eyes now on furthering and expanding the momentum on teacher learning communities from within-schools to across-schools in the form of networked learning community (NLC). This endeavor is consistent with the notion of learning from one another within the existing school cluster system where every school is part of a cluster of schools within a geographical area. This endeavor is also testament to the education ministry's forward-looking posture in terms of education policy reforms. To date, 221 NLCs were reported to have been formed in the Singapore education. Notwithstanding the exploratory, but emulative, attempt by the education ministry to promote learning communities across schools, two main considerations have to be given due attention in order to give NLCs optimal chance of success. First, is the conceptual understanding of the term. Second, is the contextual conditions that can potentially affect the implementation of NLCs. The growth of NLCs in education is not uncommon in other education systems around the world, although it may be couched in different terms (e.g., professional learning networks). The underlying rationale in the increasing use of NLCs is education policymakers' intent on increasing teaching quality through professional development platforms that support teachers' drawing diverse resources from one another. Notwithstanding the attraction of this rationale, its current conceptual understanding is still, in our view, a work-in-progress, which may eventually hamper its effective implementation, and the actualizing the full benefits that NLCs are intended to bring.



In addition, the lack of its conceptual understanding may also desensitize both planners and practitioners to the contextual conditions that can potentially hamper its effective implementation. The latter is pertinent insofar as the literature pertaining to NLCs, along with its close connection with networked learning has emanated predominantly from the West. The purpose of this paper is to give greater clarity to the conceptual understanding of NLCs, especially drawing from the literature on networks, and to highlight potential implementation issues of NLCs in an Asian education context, albeit with specific implication to school leadership in its broadest sense of the term.