FACULTY OF EDUCATION

ORAL EXAMINATION

JANET MARY LAUMAN

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
EdD

Monday, August 8, 2011
SFU Surrey, Room 5380 at 10:00 AM

EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Chair: Dr. Geoff Madoc-Jones
Senior Supervisor: Dr. Sharon Bailin
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Why Do Learning Communities Develop in Some Elementary Schools and Not in Others? A Study of Selected Elementary Schools in Greater Vancouver, British Columbia

ABSTRACT

The concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) or Learning Communities (LCs) in public schools has become more mainstream during the past ten years, as it holds great promise for helping to improve both student and adult learning and the learning experience generally. However, the ability of educators to sustain and maintain PLCs continues to be elusive. Most LCs last a short time and then falter.

The purpose of this study was to determine what factors encouraged LCs to be sustained or not to be sustained by school staffs. By shedding light on these factors, an understanding of this phenomenon was sought in order to assist staffs in making choices that would lead to their LCs becoming more systemic. The conceptualization used for the study was that a living systems approach to LCs, leads to enhanced learning and growth, whereas a managed system leads to status-quo learning and growth at best. School district leaders were approached in order to find schools suitable for this study; five elementary schools from the greater Vancouver area from within two school districts were chosen. The research was conducted as a case study using a mixed-method design.

The findings of this research suggested that a living systems approach to designing and maintaining LCs shows promise for achieving sustainability. Schools that were able to foster a more living systems approach to create and maintain their LC were experiencing shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive relational and structural conditions and the ability to operate within the British Columbia (BC) educational context in a healthy way. This led to enhanced learning and growth within these school communities for students and teachers alike. Unions and the provincial government were generally seen to be unhelpful for maintaining LCs.

The living systems approach to LCs fits well with 21st Century learning initiatives thinking. Empowering appropriate teacher leadership and ensuring the professional growth of teachers within the framework of a developing learning community was a major recommendation of this study.

Academic Record

2004 – M Ed, University of British Columbia
1981 – B Ed, University of British Columbia

Professional Experience

2007 – Present Principal, Delta School District #37
2005 – 2007 Vice-Principal, Delta School District #37
2004 – 2005 Head Teacher, Surrey School District #36
1987 – 1993 Primary Teacher, Surrey School District #36
1981 – 1987 Core Music Teacher, Surrey School District #36