


Chapter 10

A Reconceptualization of Intentional Learning Communities From a Relational Perspective in a Confucian Cultural Context

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the intentional learning community (ILC) from a Confucian cultural perspective. Based on Confucian culture that emphasizes relationality, this research provides a rationale for promoting community-building while allowing for individual meaning-making. Analyses of the literature suggest that intentional learning is both cognitive and moral, and it is situated within life contexts. However, apart from guided participation and reflection, limited research has examined ways to establish and maintain ILCs in terms of membership criteria. The study adopts a Confucian perspective to provide a rationale for creating a trustworthy atmosphere and promoting lifelong learning that addresses individual needs. It examines Confucian relationality, which includes relational identity, relational teaching and learning, and community. Heuristic teaching and self-cultivation are discussed as two approaches to enhance community building and engagement. The research concludes with implications for practice and challenges.

INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of technology and changes in workforce demands, it has become difficult for teachers to deal with challenges by themselves. Since teachers come from diverse backgrounds and have different expertise, building Intentional Learning Communities (ILCs) is crucial in promoting cooperation and fostering a learning culture. ILCs refer to groups of individuals with shared goals for collaborative

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learning (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews & Gabelnick, 2004). Initially approached from the perspective of instructional science, ILCs are then reexamined from a sociocultural perspective (Hod & Ben-Zvi, 2018). ILCs foster shared goals and sustain motivation for learning (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999). Within ILCs, teachers bring different experiences and are exposed to diverse ways of knowing. Regardless of the flexibility, learning is purposeful and achieved through a co-creative process. Although ILCs are not structured, they need to be thoughtfully created and maintained. A safe sociomoral atmosphere is crucial for authentic meaning-making and connection-building. Teachers work together to create lesson plans, exchange information and provide support.

Regardless of their importance, not enough research has been conducted to understand ways to build and sustain ILCs with regard to teacher collaboration and in international contexts. Existing research mainly focuses on student learning concerning the importance of capacity building and collective endeavors for quality improvement (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1989), guided participation (Palincsar, 1990), and reflection (Herrington, Parker & Boase-Jelinek, 2014). Without understanding teacher collaboration from a holistic perspective, intentional learning is sometimes simplified to isolated cognitive steps of meaning-making (Chee, 2014). Also, because the learning process is value-laden (Bouman, DeGraaf, Mulder, & Marion, 2005), individual interests need to be balanced with the interests of others. Moreover, regardless of the research on capacity building and collective endeavors for quality improvement, there have been limited research studies concerning the rationales that inform educational practices in specific cultural contexts. To establish a theoretical basis that sustains ILCs, this research examines ILCs from a relational perspective in a Confucian context.

A Confucian cultural perspective (Chang, 2018) proposes a change in ontology that prioritizes connections over individuality. Confucianism emphasizes relational thinking that perceives individuals and others as interdependent. This grounding enables cooperation without sacrificing individual needs. Given the mutual interests, a Confucian learning community is also moral. As a Confucian culture values connections and interdependence, understanding ILCs in a Confucian cultural context has implications for extending learning beyond the cognitive level, sustaining intentional learning, and enhancing engagement.

This research draws on relevant literature on ILCs and learning within the Confucian cultural community. It adopts a Confucian cultural perspective (Chang, 2018) that emphasizes the importance of connections and interdependence. A Confucian cultural perspective provides a rationale for promoting individual meaning-making while enhancing sharing. The study begins with a summary of recent research related to P-12 teacher professional learning community building in China. Based on the concerns, it follows with a review of intentional learning and learning within intentional learning communities. Given the challenges of balancing individual and group interests, this study examines a relational view of ILCs in a Confucian context. It considers aspects of relationality, relational identity, relational teaching and learning, and community. The study continues with discussions on Confucian heuristic teaching and self-cultivation as two approaches to creating ILCs. From a relational perspective, learning is examined as both cognitive and sociomoral processes for improvement. The research concludes with discussions on examining ILCs from a relational perspective and the challenges of promoting authentic engagement given constraints in practice.

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