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## Possibilities and Challenges of De-privatisation of Classrooms in a Developing Nation

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## Possibilities And Challenges Of De-Privatisation Of Classrooms In A Developing Nation

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*Abstract: De-privatisation of classrooms signifies the opening of classrooms so teachers can 'observe', 'be observed' or 'engage in team teaching'. This study examined the perceptions and practices of school staff to determine the possibilities and challenges of de-privatisation of classrooms in Fiji. Employing case study methodology, data were gathered from two urban secondary schools using on-line questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. A total of 71 questionnaires and 16 interviews were analysed using quantitative and qualitative methods respectively. There were several findings which emerged from the study. Firstly, that there is a strong correlation between 'observe' and 'be observed' by colleagues. Secondly, that teachers' major challenges in regard to de-privatisation of classrooms are the workload and school culture. Thirdly, in developing countries, colleagues and the heads of department are seen as the most suitable people in the school context to cultivate the effects of de-privatisation particularly inside the classroom where support is needed to help teachers improve the instructional practices. Overall, teachers, heads of department and the school administrators need to work together to establish a culture of professional learning communities (PLCs) to enhance teachers' instructional practices.*

**Key words:** professional learning community; de-privatisation; instructional practice; team teaching; observation; developing nation.

### Introduction

Fiji has an archipelago of more than 330 islands and is a geographically scattered, developing country facing its own unique challenges regarding teachers' professional learning activities. According to the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (2018), has a population of 884,887 from which 494,252 (55.9%) reside in urban areas and 390,635 (44.1%) in rural and remote areas. Rural and remote teachers have to travel long distances to attend Ministry of Education organised professional learning programmes and therefore lose a lot of teaching time (Tuimavana, 2010). This is accentuated by some teachers having to spend almost a week waiting for return transport. Meanwhile, research in Fiji has affirmed that the majority of organised professional learning programmes run by the school heads are not meeting teacher needs because they are conducted using a top-down approach (Mohan, 2016; Sharma, 2012).

Internationally, Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, and Goe (2011) argued that a major barrier to teachers' professional growth is a sense of isolation from professional learning programming that is commonly undertaken by departmental or school heads. Professional learning initiatives often apply a 'one size fits all' approach that have short-term objectives and are disconnected from the realities of teachers' classrooms (Rivero, 2006).

Gates and Gates (2014), and Ravhuhali, Kutame and Mutshaeni (2015) indicated that most professional learning initiatives simply do not benefit teachers, as they often view such professional learning offerings as irrelevant, ineffective, and unconnected to their everyday work of helping students learn (Ravhuhali et al., 2015). Similar sentiments have been shared by Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) who argued that many teachers consider that the professional learning often available to them is not useful, since it does not address their professional needs.

There are many researchers who support the model of teachers' professional learning involving colleagues actively exploring new ideas, linking previous knowledge with new understandings, reflecting on classroom practices, and mutually sharing and discussing educational practice (e.g., DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009; Owen, 2014). This process is embedded in work, where teacher learning teams are evolving (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Webster-Wright, 2009), thus helping teachers enhance their instructional practices. School-based teacher learning with colleagues, which DuFour and Eaker (1998) termed a professional learning community (PLC), is becoming the leading form of professional learning rather than teachers attending one-off professional learning activities (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Desimone, 2009; Owen, 2005). Recently, Mohan and Chand (2019) have argued that school is the best place for teacher professional learning.

A number of international studies in developed countries (US, UK, Australia) have discovered the benefits of teachers' PLCs (DuFour, 2004; Ning, Lee, & Lee, 2015; Owen, 2014; 2015; Stoll et al., 2006), however, there has been little research undertaken in developing countries such as Fiji. In addition, the literature has widely recognized the multi-dimensionality of teachers' PLCs (Slegers, den Brok, Verbiest, Moolenaar, & Daly, 2013; Stoll et al., 2006) which includes organisational, personal, and interpersonal characteristics. Very few studies have taken separate characteristics into account while studying the potential facilitating factors. Vanblaere and Devos (2016) argued that breaking down this concept into clear and distinguishable characteristics would increase the benefits of studies as these could then provide information on how specific features could enhance effectiveness. Hence, as de-privatisation of classrooms is one of the core-interpersonal characteristics of teachers' PLCs (Lee, Louis, & Anderson, 2012; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016), this study examined the perceptions and practices of teachers to determine the possibilities and challenges of de-privatisation of classrooms in Fiji. This study mainly focuses on teachers' de-privatised practice that includes sharing personal practice through classroom observations and team teaching.

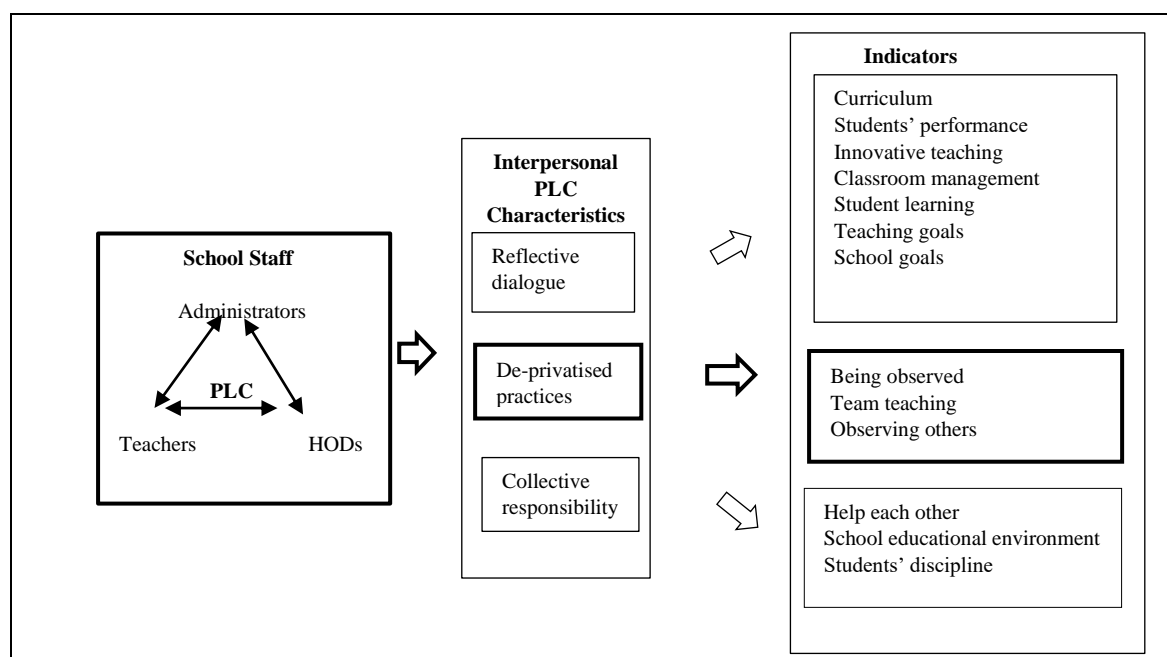
## Literature Review

In this study, a framework (Figure 1) was used so that better understanding could be achieved on a PLC, learning is theorised as a process of involvement in the PLC through interaction with other members of the community (DuFour et al., 2010). Such learning is situated in a particular social, cultural, and historical context. Knowledge is created through interaction, and is distributed and accrued among PLC members (Stoll et al., 2006). Therefore, the framework was used to help to identify a number of features involved in

teacher development activities, and represented the characteristics of PLC so better understanding could be achieved about the PLC's possibilities and challenges which were the main focus of the larger study.

After the exploration of relevant literature, several aspects were identified as likely to be critical to the effective development of PLCs in the schools included in the study; these are shown in the model (Figure 1). The data reported here is drawn from a larger study. The larger study investigated all the variables stated in Figure 1, however, this paper presents only the variables of de-privatisation, with those considered highlighted in bold. The behaviours of the school administration team and the heads of department (HODs) with respect to professional learning were expected to either facilitate or hinder teachers' PLC activities (Chu, 2015). Hence, for the purpose of this study, the school staff were divided into three categories namely administrators, heads of department and teachers who did not have any administrative post. The Footnote in Figure 1 gives the description of each category.

The three interpersonal PLC characteristics of reflective dialogue, de-privatised practices and collective responsibility were drawn from Vanblaere and Devos (2016); however, the focus of this paper is on the de-privatised practices. The indicators under consideration were 'being observed' while in the classroom, 'team teaching' and 'observing' other teachers.



**Figure 1: Theoretical framework of the larger study with the focus of this paper highlighted in bold.**

**Footnote:** School staff – inclusive of the school administrators, HODs and the teachers who do not hold any administrative posts.

Administrators – School Principal, Vice-Principal and Assistant Principal.

HODs - Heads of Department in a school eg. HOD Language, HOD Science, HOD Mathematics etc.

Teachers – novice and experienced teachers who do not hold any administrative posts.

The literature has acknowledged that teachers' PLCs are an effective approach to enabling teachers to engage in collaborative learning to improve practice in work (Lieberman & Mace, 2008; McLaughlan & Talbert, 2001). Teachers' PLCs allow for collaboration where teacher colleagues come together to actively learn and reflect on their practice (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). Reflection includes sharing personal practice through engaging in peer coaching, lesson study, classroom observations and discussion to enhance professional growth (Stoll et al., 2006). This is affirmed by Coburn and Russell (2008), Darling-

Hammond and Richardson (2009), Johnson and Johnson (2009), and Owen (2014) who identified that PLC's characteristics include: strong collaboration, active participation and supportive and distributed leadership through ongoing professional learning.

Within the last decade, there substantial research has been undertaken on the likely benefits of PLCs for school improvement (Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Researchers have acknowledged that teacher collaboration improves collegial relationships through reflective practice and hence, provides a structure for supportive and sustained teacher learning (DuFour et al., 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Stoll & Louis, 2007). Timperley (2011) pointed out that professional learning for teachers should be need-based in order to benefit the learner. In PLCs, teachers take the initiative to learn with support from colleagues (Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015; Mohan, 2016). A PLC emphasises collaborative professional learning and has moved away from isolated teaching which was commonplace in the past (Halbert & Kaser, 2013). Collaborative professional learning inspires teachers in schools to be more motivated to share their work and bring improvement to the students (Ratts et al., 2015).

Literature recognises the multi-dimensionality of teachers' PLC (Slegers et al., 2013; Stoll et al., 2006). Hord (2009) identified five characteristics of a PLC: shared values and vision, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry, and collaboration. On the other hand, Lee et al. (2012) asserted there were three interdependent characteristics of PLCs: de-privatised practices, reflective dialogue and shared responsibility. This was affirmed by Vanblaere and Devos (2016) who agreed that these three characteristics were the essence of PLCs from which one (de-privatised practice) is the focus of this study.

McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) and Vanblaere and Devos (2016) argued that it is important for schools to engage in professional learning methods that require teachers to de-privatise their classrooms; that is open classroom management, pedagogical approaches and teaching practices to their teacher colleagues through formal and informal invitations to them. This is an essential move since, for the last century, classrooms have been the domain of the individual teacher (Hiebert Gallimore & Stigler, 2002; Stigler & Hiebert, 2009) which deprived them of collegial learning. If this cultural change is achieved, Stigler and Hiebert (2009) argued that it will be characterised by embedded and stable teaching practices, which could improve teacher quality and, ultimately, student learning. Embedded learning involves sharing personal practice through engaging in peer coaching, lesson study, classroom observations and discussions (Stoll et al., 2006).

There is a significant amount of literature that supports the observation of both experienced and novice teachers as a valuable practice for teachers' professional growth (Anderson, Barksdale & Hite, 2005; Madsen & Cassidy, 2005; Mohan, 2016; Myers, 2012). Colleagues' reflection, including their "push back" and "feedback" are critical in helping teachers to integrate knowledge and accommodate their existing knowledge and beliefs to build stronger "coherence" (Desimone, 2009). Individuals can learn simply by observing others being taught and explicitly focusing on changes in behaviour (Bandura, 1997; Hanken, 2015). Teachers who observe other colleagues and share best practices have the opportunity to try new strategies and can identify improvements in their morale and practices (Almanzar, 2014). The literature underlines that student learning can be improved through lesson observation as it has the ability to enhance teachers' knowledge and practice through collegial reflection and constructive feedback (Hart, Alston, & Murata, 2011; Lewis, Perry, & Hurd, 2009; Meyer & Wilkerson, 2011). As a PLC, peer lesson observation enhances collegiality through teachers continuously working together to share expertise and engage in constructive reflection with colleagues (Hadar & Brody, 2013; Hurd & Lewis, 2011). However, Gutierrez (2016) found that finding suitable time for meeting/s was a challenge for teachers. A supportive school leadership that provides opportunities and creates conditions

where teachers do not feel threatened and are allowed to make errors in the interests of improvement, is more likely to facilitate mutual observation and de-privatisation (Gutierrez, 2016; Lewis et al., 2009). This means that the success of peer lesson observation also depends on the support to teachers provided by school administrators (Lewis et al., 2006).

Another way to de-privatise classrooms to facilitate teachers' professional growth is through team teaching (Friend & Cook, 2003; Mohan, Swabey, & Kertesz, 2019). Team teaching involves a group of teachers working purposefully, regularly, and cooperatively to help a group of students learn (Sundarsingh, 2015). As a team, the teachers work together in setting goals for the subject, discussing and designing curriculum, preparing lesson plans, teaching students together, and evaluating the results (Buckley, 2000). Two or more teachers can work together effectively to provide all possible opportunities for the learners to learn. Collaboration among team teachers is a unique teaching style through which knowledge and skills can be imparted (Friend & Cook, 2003). Teachers feel better about their profession when they work with colleagues to identify, plan, teach and assess student learning (Almanzar, 2014). The best part of teacher teams is when each member can showcase their individual strengths for the betterment of the team (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Once teachers know each other's strengths and weakness, they can work effectively together to design classroom materials and assessments to allow for the development of innovative ideas to enhance teaching and learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Finally, as observation and team teaching involves de-privatisation of classrooms, it is important to study the impact of de-privatisation of classrooms on teachers and the degree to which it enables professional learning and improves teacher instruction (Teitel, 2009). Hence, this study examined the perceptions and practices of teachers to determine the possibilities and challenges of de-privatisation of classrooms in Fiji.

## **Methodology**

### **Case Study Approach**

This study was part of a larger study (see figure 1), titled: *Fijian Secondary School Teachers' Perceptions of the Interpersonal Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities* which took place in Fiji and has utilised data from two urban case study schools (identified as schools A and B). According to Yin (2003), a case study is a first-hand investigation that looks at a phenomenon within its accepted setting, when the issues are difficult to investigate by looking at a larger context. Literature acknowledges that the strength of the case study approach is that it allows detailed exploration and interrogation of an activity using multiple methods and data sources (Bush, 2002; Stark & Torrance, 2005).

School A was located in the heart of a town with around 700 students and 45 teachers, classifying it as a large school under the Fijian education system. It caters for students from Years 9-13 (Grades 9-13) and is a coeducational school with boarding facilities for both boys and girls and has quite a number of teachers' quarters. However, more than half of the students and teachers travel daily from home to attend school. On the other hand, even though School B was also located in the heart of town, it was on a different island to school A. It had around 1000 students and 59 teachers, therefore, categorised as a large school. Like School A, School B caters for students from Years 9-13 and is coeducational. However, all the students and teachers of school B travel daily from home to school.

### Population and Sample

The staff population of schools A and B were 45 and 59 respectively. Data collection utilised questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. From school A, a total of 35 (78%) of the staff members completed the questionnaire of which 18 were male and 17 were female. In terms of years of experience, three had 1-3 years, 11 had 4-6 years, 10 had 7-9 years and 11 had 10 years and above. For school B, 36 (61%) of the staff members took part in the survey of which 27 were male and 9 were female. With respect to years of experience, two had 1-3 years, nine had 4-6 years, 13 had 7-9 years and 12 had 10 years and above (see Table 1).

SCHOOL	SEX		TOTAL	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE				TOTAL
	MALE	FEMALE		1-3	4-6	7-9	>9	
A	18	17	35	3	11	10	11	35
B	27	9	36	2	9	13	12	36

**Table 1: Demographic Data**

Interviews were conducted with eight interview participants (five male, three female) from school A of whom three were heads of department, two were administrators, and the remaining three teachers were non-post holders. For school B, from the eight participants, four were male, and four were female. In regard to their posts in school, three were heads of departments, two were administrators, and three teachers were non-post holders.

### Ethics Approval

As part of the research ethics, approval was sought from the University of Tasmania, Fiji Ministry of Education Research and Ethics Council and later from the participants. Before taking consent from the participants, information sheets were distributed to all the staff members of the two case study schools informing them of the objectives and scope of the research. All the participants were given the assurance that the data collected were only for the purpose of research and would be kept confidential. Assurance was also given for the anonymity of the participants and the school.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection utilised explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. Quantitative data was collected in phase one of the study from the two case study schools using the questionnaire. The quantitative data informed the qualitative phase of the research and facilitated the crafting of the questions for the interview sessions. The in-depth and contextualised insights associated with the interview were used to better understand, explain, and build on the results from the predictive power of the quantitative approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). This was particularly true for this research, whereby the qualitative data was used to enhance the quantitative findings and enable more detailed information about de-privatisation of the classrooms.

The questionnaire about PLCs for the larger study was adapted from Vanblaere and Devos (2016). The initial questionnaire had closed questions only but it was modified to add open-ended questions to allow the participants to comment on the issues addressed by the questionnaire items. However, there were no issues raised by the participants on the questionnaire items. The questionnaire consisted of 33 items comprising three parts. In the

first part, the participants were requested to provide information on demographic details such as school location, gender, qualification, and teaching experience. The second part consisted of items based on the indicators of the three interpersonal characteristics of a PLC (see Figure 1), and the teachers were asked of their perceptions using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (uncertain), 4 (agree) and 5 (strongly agree). The third part of the questionnaire captured teacher's reports of their current practices of the items listed in part two, again using a 5-point Likert scale. With respect to this aspect the scale ranged from 1 (never), 2 (less than weekly), 3 (weekly), 4 (more than weekly) and 5 (always). This study utilised the *Qualtrics* online survey platform to administer the questionnaire.

Purposeful sampling was used for the semi-structured interviews. The participants were invited to have an interview based on the role they held in their school. Three teachers, three heads of department and two administrators from each school who had provided consent were interviewed. The interviews for the study lasted up to an hour. With the permission of the participants, the interviews were recorded on a digital recorder to ensure accuracy.

Descriptive, correlational and inferential statistical analysis was carried out for the questionnaire data using SPSS version 24. The dependent variables in the study were not normally distributed for each sample, hence non-parametric analysis was used. The Mann-Whitney U test was used in the inferential analysis to test for significance and Kendall's tau b was performed to see if there was any correlation between the items.

The interviews were analysed using a thematic approach using open coding, axial coding and selective coding for the development of themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Coding is the process of sorting data into various categories that organise it and render it meaningful from the vantage point of one or more frameworks or sets of ideas (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). The qualitative findings were used to build upon the quantitative findings.

## Findings

### Quantitative Data

Using the data obtained from sections 2 and 3 of the questionnaire, scale percentage frequencies, Mann-Whitney U test and Kendall's tau b were computed of the staff perceptions for the items under de-privatised practices. Table 2 presents the percentage frequencies and the Mann-Whitney U test results.

Item	School	N	Percentage for Perceptions					Mann-Whitney U test	
			1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	Mean Rank	p-value
It is important to invite colleagues to observe your instruction	A	35	2.9	11.4	25.7	42.9	17.1	33.84	.344
	B	36	0.0	5.6	19.4	61.1	13.9	38.10	
It is important to engage in team teaching with colleagues	A	35	0.0	0.0	25.7	40.0	34.3	34.77	.597
	B	36	0.0	2.8	16.7	41.7	38.9	37.19	
It is important to visit other colleagues' classrooms to observe instruction	A	35	0.0	2.9	17.1	60.0	20.0	36.17	.939
	B	36	0.0	8.3	16.7	50.0	25.0	35.83	

**Table 2: Percentage Frequencies and Mann-Whitney U Test of Staff Perceptions**



According to Table 2, the majority of the staff of both schools perceived that it was important to engage in classroom observations and team teaching. For the first indicator, inviting colleagues to observe classroom instruction, in school A, the total for agreed and strongly agreed was 60% when compared to 75% in school B. For the second indicator, engaging in team teaching with colleagues, in school A, 74.3% of staff either agreed or strongly agreed in comparison to 80.6% in school B. For the third indicator, visiting other colleagues' classrooms to observe instruction, for school A, the total for agreeing and strongly agree was 80% while for school B it was 75%.

After performing the Mann-Whitney U test for the items it was revealed that there was no significant difference in the perceptions of the staff of the two schools as the computed p-value for all the items were greater than 0.05 ( $p \geq .05$ ). In addition, the Kendall's tau b was performed to see if there was any correlation between the items. It was found that there were correlations between the items. Firstly, it was revealed that there was a correlation between inviting colleagues to observe instruction and engaging in team teaching with colleagues ( $t = .303$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Secondly, correlation was found between inviting colleagues to observe instruction and visiting other colleagues' classrooms to observe instruction ( $t = .301$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

The scale percentage frequencies, Mann-Whitney U test and Kendall's tau b were also computed for the staff practices. Table 3 presents the percentage frequencies and the Mann-Whitney U test results.

Item	School	N	Percentage for Practices					Mann-Whitney U test	
			1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	Mean Rank	p-value
How often do you invite colleagues to observe your instruction	A	35	57.1	40.0	0.0	2.9	0.0	35.17	.704
	B	36	58.3	25.0	5.6	11.1	0.0	36.81	
How often do you engage in team teaching with colleagues	A	35	14.3	65.7	5.7	8.6	5.7	38.80	.219
	B	36	36.1	38.9	19.4	2.8	2.8	33.28	
How often do you visit other colleagues' classrooms to observe instruction	A	35	54.3	45.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	37.31	.538
	B	36	66.7	22.2	8.3	2.8	0.0	34.72	

**Table 3: Percentage Frequencies and Mann-Whitney U Test of Staff Practices**

Looking at the staff practices, Table 3 revealed that there was a majority of the staff of both schools who hardly engaged in de-privatised practices. For the indicators inviting colleagues to observe classroom instruction and visiting other colleagues' classrooms to observe instruction, in both schools more than half of the staff never practiced it. Looking at the indicator engaging in team teaching with colleagues, for school A, 14.3% of staff members never practiced it compared to 36.1% in school B.

After performing the Mann-Whitney U test for the items it was revealed that there was no significant difference in the practices of the staff of the two schools as the computed p-value for all the items was greater than 0.05 ( $p \geq .05$ ). In addition, the Kendall's tau b was performed to see if there was any correlation between the items. It was found that there were correlation between the items. Firstly, it was revealed that there was a correlation between inviting colleagues to observe instruction and engaging in team teaching with colleagues ( $t = .360$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Secondly, a strong correlation was found between inviting colleagues to observe instruction and visiting other colleagues' classrooms to observe instruction ( $t = .560$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

### **Qualitative Data**

Quotes from the interview data were utilised to capture the perceptions and practices in detail via the participants' own voices to answer the research questions. The views of teachers who were non-post holders (T), heads of department (HOD) and the administrators (A) are quoted when appropriate to cross check the perspectives and consolidate trustworthiness of the findings.

#### **Invite Colleagues to Observe Classroom Instruction**

When the participants were asked of their perceptions and practices of inviting colleagues to observe classroom instruction, the teachers of school A and B responded similarly:

It is important. Probably the close colleagues could give us better critical feedback which could be very beneficial to us. But here only HODs and admin observe lessons. After the lesson they give us the feedback on our strengths and weakness. The HODs are able to talk more on the content when compared to administrators. However, they should also tell us how to improve our weakness. (School A T2)

It is a good idea. But we don't practice here. In my teaching career so far, I haven't practiced this but I feel I will try now. (School B T2)

The heads of department explained what the current practice was:

In this school the HOD and admin observe classes. No one invites them but it is the requirement of the ministry that at least two per term the teacher's lessons are to be observed, recorded and feedback are to be given. (School A HOD 1)

It is very good idea. Learning is continues, so it should not stop. Getting feedback from colleagues is very good because we should be able to know our weakness and improve on it. After observation, both can sit together and discuss the way forward. (School B HOD3)

The administrators also felt it was a good idea, but it was not common practice:

It is a good idea. I feel teachers can learn from their close colleagues better as they will feel more confident to share ideas. Sometimes we only give them the general feedback as we don't have the content knowledge. HODs are in a better position to discuss content. However, currently it is not practiced because the culture is such that teachers are bit reserved to invite their colleagues. (School A A1)

I think it will work but the problem is the loading. We have some teachers only free for an hour a day which they use it for preparing lessons. It is a very effective way of learning from colleagues but unfortunately, we are running against time. If the ministry can reduce teachers load by giving more teachers, it could be effectively implemented. Friends will be critical in giving feedback which will help improve the teacher. (School B A1)

The interviews showed that the school staff perceived that inviting colleagues to observe classroom instruction was a very good idea but due to the workload and the school culture they were unable to practice this activity.

#### ***Engaging in team teaching with colleagues***

When the teachers of school A and B were asked about the perceptions and the practices of engaging in team teaching with colleagues, the responses included:

It is a good idea. We usually have it in the third term when the syllabus is over. The first two terms are used to cover the syllabus as the Ministry wants the coverage to be completed in two terms, so we work against time. But in the third term we exchange classes and teach or sometimes instead of one teacher two teachers go to help students. (School A T3)

We hardly practice this in term one and two. But in the revision class which is in the third term we do help students in groups. (School B T2)

Similar sentiments were shared by the heads of department:

We practice team teaching in the third term. Teachers discuss amongst themselves what to teach and how to teach. The timetable is made to cater for team teaching in the third term since it is the revision time. We divide students in groups, smart ones together, slow learners together and average ones together and teachers are allocated for each group. (School A HOD 2)

Team teaching is good. We do this in literature class. New teachers are not very confident teaching literature so senior teachers help them. We work as a team. The challenge faced is the timing. Because of workload it sometimes becomes difficult. (School B HOD3)

This was further confirmed by the administrators:

It happens in the third term. More than one teacher goes in one form in revision class.

We do this to cater for slow learners, average learners and smart students. We group them according to ability and teachers go and guide different groups. (School A A1)

This we do after our syllabus is over. We try and swap classes so that students get chance to learn from another teacher. We also send more than one teacher in one class during revision class. (School B A2)

The interviews showed that the school staff perceived engaging in team teaching with colleagues was a very good idea however, they mostly practiced team teaching in the third term. Due to the pressure on staff to complete the syllabus in the first two terms, it became difficult for them to engage in team teaching, therefore, it was mostly practiced in the third term when the syllabus was over, and revision was going on.

### *Visiting Other Colleagues' Classrooms to Observe Instruction*

When the participants were asked of their perceptions and practices of visiting other colleagues' classrooms to observe instruction the teachers of school A and B responded as follows:

It is a really good idea for the learner. Especially we the new teachers can learn new strategies to help us be better teachers. (School A T2)

We don't do it but if given a chance by anyone definitely I will do it. (School B T3)

This was affirmed by the heads of department:

It is a good idea. If done at a professional level it could be very effective. It is not happening in this school. The challenge is we need to break the culture that inferior can't observe superior's class. This can be done through admin support. (School A HOD 2)

It is a very good idea. It is not to be-little anyone but to learn from them. The main purpose should be learning. It will be something like PD for us. It can be very helpful for new teachers. However, it is not happening in this school. (School B HOD 2)

When the administrators were asked the same question, this is what they had to say:

Here the admin and HODs observe lessons to assess the teachers. The new teachers can do it if they have the initiative. But it is not mandatory. I think it would be a good

idea to make it mandatory for teachers to observe colleagues' classes for the purpose of learning. (School A A1)

In our HOD meeting and the staff meeting I have asked teachers to observe other teachers to learn from them. I feel the new teachers who are now coming out from teacher colleges are not of the standard when we were trained. The cut-off marks to become a teacher now is 200 before it was 280 plus. The teacher standards are very low nowadays, therefore, learning from colleagues will really help improve their teaching. (School B A1)

The interviews showed that the school staff perceived that visiting other colleagues' classrooms to observe instruction was a very good idea, but it was rarely practiced in the schools. Due to the school culture and policies of the school and the Ministry, the staff members are reluctant to visit other teachers' classrooms to observe instruction. School leaders could help in initiating this practice.

## Discussion

The study explored the perceptions and the practices of the school staff on de-privatisation of classrooms to determine the enablers and the challenges of a developing nation. The quantitative and qualitative analysis established that there were no significant difference between the perceptions and practices of the staff members of the two schools in regards to de-privatisation of classrooms. The majority of the staff in both the schools perceived that de-privatising the classrooms was important and would help in enhancing teachers' instructional practices, however the results revealed that currently it is rarely used in practice.

The quantitative analysis revealed that there was a correlation between 'being observed' and 'team teaching' and also between 'being observed' and 'observe' which indicated that if a teacher did not invite colleagues to observe instructions, it was likely that he/she would also not engage in team teaching. Similarly, the strong correlation between 'being observed' and 'observe' indicated that if a teacher was not inviting colleagues to observe instruction, it was highly likely that he/she would not visit other colleagues' classroom to observe instruction.

For the first indicator 'being observed', the analysis of the data revealed that most of the staff perceived that it was important, however more than half of them have never practiced it. The current norm is that classes are being observed by the HODs and the administrators to assess teachers as it is the requirement of the Ministry of Education. Due to such practice the teachers are reserved to go against the school culture, hence they rarely invite colleagues to their classrooms. This supports Hiebert et al. (2002) and Stigler and Hiebert (2009) who avowed that teachers are used to the norm of an individualist tradition. However, during the past century the tradition of individualised teaching has not helped to sustain teachers' professional growth (Halbert & Kaser, 2013); a cultural change through de-privatisation of classrooms could be the way forward as asserted by DuFour et al. (2010) and Stoll and Louis (2007). Furthermore, the analysis of data has unpacked that the present practice in schools is that when the heads of department or the administrators observe teachers, they lack the skills of giving teachers feedback about their teaching. Teachers have shared that even if they did give them feedback, they just reported the strengths and the weaknesses without discussing the solutions to the weak areas.

As for the second indicator 'team teaching', the analysis of the data revealed that the school staff are in favour of team teaching. Teachers have strongly acknowledged that they are able to help students learn better through the collaborative experiences of team teaching

which supports Buckley's (2000) claim. However, it was found that there were quite a number of teachers who never practiced team teaching even though they believed it could be very helpful in improving students' performance. Some of the reasons for the non-practice are teachers' workload and compact coverage. The teachers, the heads of department and the administrators' comments affirmed that team teaching only happened in the revision classes which is basically in the third term after the coverage is complete. The school staff believed that through team teaching with colleagues, they are able to work cooperatively to help students learn better; this is consistent with Sundarsingh's (2015) claim. The results acknowledge that the students benefit mostly from the dominant form of de-privatisation of team teaching which supports Friend and Cook (2003) and Sundarsingh's (2015) findings.

Looking at the indicator 'observe', the quantitative analysis confirmed that the majority of the staff perceived that it was important to visit other colleagues' classroom to observe instruction however, more than half of them have never practiced it. The analysis of the qualitative data highlighted that the novice teachers were sometimes deprived from learning through observing their seniors due to the school culture. However, if the senior teachers knew they were genuinely being observed due to some unique qualities in them and the purpose of the junior teachers observing them was learning, the culture could definitely change. The staff members believed that the school culture could change through the support of the administrators. There needs to be more awareness on the benefits of such practice. Such cultural change in the schools could largely benefit the novice teachers as they will be able to learn from their seniors as asserted by Mohan (2016).

The data analysis revealed that there was a substantial difference in the teachers' perceptions and practices. Teachers believed that if they had more opportunities to engage in de-privatised practices, they could be better classroom teachers. Teachers were positive about the benefits of opening their classrooms to colleagues however, they had little opportunity to experience this. Looking through the PLC lens, it can be alleged that through de-privatisation like observation and team teaching, teachers could indeed improve their instructional practices through engaging in collaborative learning where teachers' colleagues could come together to actively learn and reflect on their practice (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). However, this requires teachers to genuinely engage in learning with other colleagues in the school and be a firm believer that it is the way forward as acknowledged by Chu (2015).

The results indicated that expertise, time, and school culture are essential for effective de-privatisation. The findings strongly accentuate the importance of leadership support; however, it also affirmed that many teachers value the feedback of their close colleagues more than that of the leaders especially the administrators. In addition, teachers also believed that the heads of department could facilitate the collaborative process of learning better than the school administrators since they have the subject knowledge. Significantly, unlike the present trend of administrators, which is observing teachers for accountability, instead of the focus being teacher improvement. The teachers believed that the heads of department could cultivate de-privatisation within their departments to make it more effective. The qualitative analysis unpacked that sometimes the school administrators lacked subject knowledge to develop the skills of instruction needed for teachers. Hence, the support of subject expertise (heads of department) is a critical component of teacher improvement which aligns with Timperley's (2011) work.

In Fiji, heads of department seem to be the most suitable people in the school context to cultivate the effects of de-privatisation particularly inside the classroom to assist teachers to improve the instructional practices; this would be cost effective. This would be unlike developed countries, where Chu (2015) claimed, that expertise from outside should be used to improve instructional practice of teachers. However, for the smaller departments which

have only one or two teachers and where collaboration within the department is limited, expertise from outside could be an option if affordable even for developing countries.

The data analysis affirmed that the schools need a culture where all staff members work and learn together to enhance students' learning. This requires school administrators and the heads of department to create a learning culture and structure that invites teachers to participate. These results are consistent with the literature about school improvement which recognises the importance of school leaders in establishing PLCs and evaluating the impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Owen, 2014). The staff members believed that professional learning takes place through de-privatisation when the school staff are dedicated to their instructional practice and are committed as a group. These conditions align with the assertions made by DuFour et al. (2010) which indicated how a PLC could be cultivated.

## Conclusion

De-privatisation of classrooms seem to be one of the useful strategies which could be employed by schools to nurture professional learning and promote improved teaching in schools. Teachers should be encouraged to engage in classroom observations and team teaching. 'Being observed' and 'observe' could be highly beneficial to teachers if close colleagues are involved as they could receive critical feedback from those with whom they feel comfortable. In addition, in developing countries like Fiji, heads of department seem to be the most suitable people in the school's context to cultivate the effects of de-privatisation particularly inside the classroom to support teachers' improve their instructional practices. However, de-privatisation experiences need to be embedded within a carefully resourced school plan, which is driven by the school leadership.

Overall, the importance of overcoming current practices to build on the positive perceptions is essential in a developing nation with less access to, or funding for, external experts to change school culture, facilitate de-privatisation, and perhaps the need for reduced pressure from the Ministry of Education, or at least a re-orientation.

The study, though small in scale has uncovered useful insights on some relevant information about teachers' de-privatised practices in a developing nation in the Pacific. Since, this study involved two urban case study schools, more in-depth and large scale empirical inquiries involving rural and remote schools are essential to be able to generalise the findings. Undertaking such studies should help not only to generate useful information but also provide deeper insights into teachers' de-privatised practices. Such sound empirical evidence can then help influence policy and practice.

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