Why Some Teachers are not Likely to Engage in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) Designed for Teachers’ Professional Development to Help Them Adapt to Educational Innovation

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We accept the Thesis as conforming to the required standard

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to consider the reasons of teacher’s non-engagement of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and how to implement effective professional learning in schools. Teacher’s experience of PLCs is explored in the study, as well as how to embed professional growth in teacher’s point of view. Participants who are teachers from VIU Educational Department who volunteered to participate in this study. Nine out of 38 participants completed an online survey including Likert scale and open-ended questions via SurveyMonkey. The results of the study released that time management, collaboration and leadership were three major factors that affect teachers’ involvement in PLCs. Professional Growth and common mission were also concerned by participants. For further study, clear collaborative mode should be explored. The relationship between teacher’s empowerment and inquiry mindset is also worth to considered.
Acknowledgements

Foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. John Phipps. He inspired me with his open-mindedness and professional knowledge. He allowed me to make mistakes, but his guidance was always there when I needed it. My views were valued by Dr. Phipps. Also, he encouraged me to value my voice. I thank him for accompanying me on this great journey.

Thanks to my husband, Fei Xiong whose support, encouragement, and being behind me all the way made my dream become a reality.

To Alice and Vivian, my daughters, you two constantly stimulate me to be a better person and educator.

Finally, to my friend Lynn, thank you for your patient understanding.
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Chapter One: Problem to be Investigated

Problem of the Study

The problem investigated in this study is that some teachers in China are not likely to engage in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that are designed for teachers’ professional development to help them adapt to educational innovation. Every teacher has a responsibility for his/her students. Teachers’ teaching and learning cultures have a significant impact on students’ learning cultures. Education is facing unprecedented challenges in the 21st century because of the rapid development of society, the economy, globalization, and technology. Therefore, the traditional role for education, which is to provide workers for society, is forced to transform to meet new expectations and challenges. Hence, teachers are expected to shift their mindset from knowledge delivery to instructors and life-long learners. PLCs can prepare teachers for collaboration and reflective practice, which is beneficial for teachers’ professional improvement and role shifting (Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015). However, the problem is that some teachers, whether they are willing to make professional improvements or not, do not choose to participant in PLCs or cannot enjoy

If teachers are unwilling to engage in PLCs, then it is difficult for teachers to meet their professional improvement. Thus, they cannot meet the requirements of teachers in the near future because they cannot instruct their students with different learning ways and structures with open-mindedness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to research reasons why some teachers do not
engage in PLCs. PLCs can be made more suitable for teachers from the aspects of its structure, schedule and embedding way, as long as the reasons are explored.

Furthermore, teachers can gain a better understanding of PLCs through the participation in the research. Also, there would be an enhancement of the relationship between teachers and PLCs activities with positive teachers’ learning cultures which can boost education transition.

**Justification of the Study**

Many factors have affected education in recent years. As we are moving into the future, the old style of teaching will not be viable in a few decades, since globalization and technological innovation have been changing the world (Senturk, 2008). Globalization increases the speed of world transformation, which connects the world in convenient ways. Global education should have a sense of worldwide systems that encourage international development and contribute to global knowledge expansion.

Moreover, technology has a significant effect on modern society and education, from kindergarten to higher education (Guri-Rozenblit, 2009). Technologies accelerate the speed of the construction and distribution of knowledge. They also challenge the different levels of education organizations to redefine the redesign the learning and teaching process.

Therefore, knowledge about how to read, write, and calculate is not enough for the students for world transformation. Students need to have critical thinking and problem-solving abilities to help them see the things in different ways and deal with
uncertain problems in the future. They also need to be prepared with collaboration and leadership skills so that they can work in a group, take different roles in a team, and achieve common goals with each other. In addition, curiosity and creativity are crucial for students in the future.

To prepare students, teachers need to be retrained first because teachers need to learn new skills and update knowledge to adapt to the change of education. They alter their mindset to focus more on how to help students develop skills instead of filling them with knowledge. Professional Learning Community activities provide teachers with opportunities to talk with each other about their practice (Pease-Alvarez & Schecter, 2005). Teachers can participate in a constant cycle of collaborative inquiry questioning based on their own experience of building a group that shares knowledge as professionals. PLCs also form a safe pace for educators to discuss and analyze their work. Therefore, through PLCs, teachers can set stage goals, reflect on their work, move from isolation to collaboration, and build a critical thinking ability.

Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, and Box (2014) stated that the ability to collaborate and participate in PLCs a is an essential skill that all educators must have in the 21st century because teachers’ professional learning culture directly links to school efficiency and students’ learning culture. Thus, before teachers enter into or are in the process of educational innovation, skills like collaboration and collegiality have to be developed.

However, some teachers choose not to engage in PLCs. They may attend the activity, but they do not share their vision or discuss their experience and teaching
data with colleagues, which is a barrier for them to gain progress in the professional area. It is also a blockade for education transition. Moreover, PLC activities are different from the traditional cooperation of teachers because in PLCs, participants focus on solving problems related to student learning (Hoaglund et al., 2014). PLCs also enable teachers to practice the skills in actual situations. Thus, without engaging in PLCs, it is difficult for teachers to be effectively collaborative. Teachers cannot gain enough support for them to develop professional skills.

**Research Question and Hypothesis**

The research question for the present study is, *why do some teachers not want to participate in professional development learning activities?* The hypothesis of the author of the present study proposes that teachers lack time because of stressful working schedules, family, the setting of the PLC structure is not suitable for the group of teachers, the ways schools implement PLCs do not personalize enough, the knowledge present in PLCs cannot arouse teachers’ interest; for example, it is not based on inquiry thinking.

**Definition of Terms**

**Professional Learning Community.** Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are communities that are built by schools to help teachers acquire academic knowledge, develop critical thinking, cultivate collaboration, develop leadership, and improve teaching skills in order to gain the ability to be life-long learners and improve students’ achievement. PLC activities include conferences, online studies, discussion in groups, giving open classes and observing open classes, and giving feedback to
each other.

**Participation.** Participation in PLCs means that teachers show up at activities regularly, pay positive attention, share important information, reflect on their practice and student data, discuss possible solutions for real situations, share power, and offer critical feedback to colleagues for improvement.

**Brief Overview of Study**

The present study will investigate the reasons why some teachers are unwilling or cannot engage in PLC activities. Participants will complete a survey online that includes open-answer questions about their teaching practice and their sense of PLC activities. The research data will be based on statistical survey results and be analyzed to determine the reason impacting teachers’ participation in PLC activities.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

There is extensive previous research literature showing various versions of definitions of PLCs from different experts. Based on recent research, PLCs influence a school’s learning culture and students’ learning results (Dufour & Dufour, 2012; Weiner & Higgins, 2017). However, there are still some teachers who are not enjoying their PLCs journey, therefore, figuring out the reasons behind this lack of teacher’s involvement can help with PLCs improvement (Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma & Geijsel, 2011; Dufour & Dufour, 2012)

A major structure for PLCs to be effective is cooperation. Teachers’ mindsets are essential because PLCs is a process of updating knowledge and changing old patterns in the learning environment. If the desire of improving students’ learning levels is a motivation of teachers’ learning and cooperation, the growth mindset should be a basic element to keep teachers’ vigor in learning. Teachers having cooperation and a growth mindset can be seen as a vigor-booster. To help teachers engage in PLCs, a clear mission and an appropriate assessment for a group of teachers are also vital.

Three Different Perspective of PLCs

Dufour and Dufour (2012) stated that the main purpose of school is to ensure that every student studies at a high level. The most useful strategy to achieve this goal is forming a school into a learning community to develop teachers’ learning abilities. They believed that instead of being an attachment of a school’s current structure and cultures, PLC is a process that deeply influences learning institution’s present
structure and culture. It is not a meeting, a reading club or an activity. PLC should be a spirit that emerges in the teaching routine.

Weiner and Higgins (2017) focused on the understudied connection between teachers’ and students’ perceptions of school culture. The sample population was 130,000 students and 9000 teachers in 225 New York City traditional public schools. Weiner and Higgins (2017) investigated three main problems. Firstly, what extent of school environmental factors can affect teachers’ professional culture? Secondly, how do these factors can influence students’ learning culture? Finally, how do these two cultures influence each other? They used the data based on surveys of teachers and students in New York City from the 2008-2009, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. Weiner and Higgins (2017) found that students can shape a positive learning culture when teachers feel psychologically safe, cooperate well, and have enough teaching materials. They suggested that if schools can pay attention to teachers’ and students’ culture at the same time, it can bring positive change to schools.

Wilson (2016) stated that professional learning communities could enhance teachers’ leadership if principals empower their teachers. The author also specified that professional learning community was influenced by the school culture. The study included online surveys which included a survey based on Hord’s (1997) School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire (SPSLCQ) and an open-ended questionnaire to collect teachers’ experiences and understanding of the relationship between PLC and teacher leadership.

Wilson’s (2016) research sample was chosen from a school district in central
Florida consisting of different people from a variety of area, such as rural, urban, and suburban areas. The study population included students of 9th and 10th grade from eight schools in the school district who were selected in Small Learning Communities (SCL), and teachers in the same grade and schools with children who were willing to attend Professional Learning community working with students in SLC groups.

Wilson (2016) concluded that principals have significant influence on teachers’ leadership rather than school cultures and PLC were strongly evident. He also stated that principals using distributed leadership techniques with their teachers lead to teachers gaining leadership development skills. Moreover, he identified that culture is the norms of schools including systems, processes, procedures and mindset. Transformational culture should begin with the relationship of the principal with teachers.

**Important Aspects of Effective PLCs**

According to Thoonen, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma & Geijsel (2011), there are two large components of a teacher’s motivation: motivated behavior and motivational factors. Motivational factors have significant influence on motivated behavior. Motivational factors are composed of expectancy, value and emotional constituency. Self-efficacy is a basic construction of the expectancy, which is a belief that you are able to achieve a goal or accomplish a specific task. When teachers have high self-efficacy, they are likely to be well planned and organized. They are more willing to accept new ideas and new approaches. They are more patient with struggling students and can give them better instruction. Teachers with high self-efficacy are
resilient. When they are struggling to reach their goals, they can throw more effort into it and persist longer. They also have engagement in PLC activities.

Moreover, the authors stated that if school goals can be accepted by teachers as their own personal goals and values, then it will become a motivation for teachers and these teachers are likely to engage in professional learning. Similarly, teachers who feel positive emotions in the school work are likely to participate in PLC activities. Meanwhile, teachers who feel uncertainty are likely to do routine work, trying to avoid risks and maintaining old patterns of education.

Dweck (2012) classified people into two groups in general. One group is the people who have a growth mindset, while another group is the people with a fixed mindset. She believed that different mindsets cause momentous differences and distinctions for people. She claimed that people with a fixed mindset are likely to think that there is no possibilities for changes in intelligence, personalities and abilities, while people who have a growth mindset consider all these three can be developed during the life time.

Dweck (2012) claimed that people who believe their qualities are immutable are eager to prove themselves. They care how other’s judgement about them more than their real abilities. This leads them to consume time to prove themselves instead of making effort to develop their abilities. Therefore, they are afraid of difficulties and challenges. When they fail, they tend to blame on environment or others instead of learning from the mistakes, because they regard failure as not intelligent enough. When they succeed, they feel superior. In contrast, the author asserted that people who
have growth mindset have a good ability for self-examination and looking inward. They admit that their intelligence and abilities can be improved by making efforts towards this. Hence, they are willing to take risks and challenges and their qualities grow from their experience. They focus on how to improve from the mistakes and expand their potential.

According to Dweck’s study, teachers’ mindset will impact to students, because there is a large amount of information containing in teacher’s language that will deliver to children who will form their perception toward themselves based on the information. It means students who are cultivated by growth-minded teachers are likely to take proceed high demanded tasks and enjoy the process of making effort to solve difficult problems because they have strong resilience. When they receive feedback from teachers, they view this feedback as information that can help them grow their abilities, while students who have a fixed mindset may take this feedback as judgements and try to avoid challenges.

However, it is always never too late to build growth mindset in teaching, stated Dweck (2014). Teachers who want to develop a growth mindset need to recognize the fixed mindset in their minds. Then listen to the ideas in their fixed mindset and establish a discussion group sharing what these ideas are about. Meanwhile, listen to ideas of their growth mindset as well. The final step is realizing that risks and obstacles are crucial parts of learning and making choices.

DuFour and Dufour stated (2012) it is vital to creating a clear mission for building a strong PLC in the school. The mission boosts knowledge-sharing and leads
to sharing of responsibilities. The most effective way to empower teacher groups is providing the same accesses to information to teachers. By spreading leadership among teachers, principals can build a coalition to make sure all teachers are concerned about student performance and the operation of the school. Teachers can make decisions together by learning together and getting the information before they make decisions.

Authors believe that there are three pillars to support the action of fulfilling the school mission (Dufour & Dufour, 2012). They are vision, collective commitments and goals. Vision is the focus on the school. A shared vision describes a desirable and credible future of the school and what actions need to be taken for fulfilling the school purpose. Collective commitments focus on individuals—how each teacher can do things to make the school move forward towards the vision. Establishing of goals is for specific actionable steps. In this stage, teachers set SMART goals for keeping track of improvement. According to DuFour and Dufour (2012), a smart goal is “strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results oriented, and time bound” (p. 12). Principals can monitor each step and provide appropriate support in this stage. The goals will be achieved at certain times for the planned school growth. Dufour and Dufour (2012) also offered several actions to acquire collaborative working time for teachers, which include adjust teacher’s daily work length, assigning common class time for teachers of the same subject and combing two different grade levels students to free one group of teachers.

Eaker and Dufour (2002) demonstrated how to form a PLC conceptual
framework. They claimed that there are three main themes for the PLC model. Firstly, all staff in the school should have shared mission, vision, values and goals. Secondly, teachers need to establish collaborative teams. Finally, the teams should create common assessment that focus on results for further improvement. Shared mission, vision, values and goals are foundation of the PLC, because they raise the most important questions to teachers: the purpose of the school, the reasons for existing of the school, what kind of school teachers want to build, the measurable steps and timeline to guide them keeping in track of their improvement. These researchers also held the view that a collaborative team is a driving engine for moving school forward to develop school’s competence of helping all students’ high level of learning. Teachers can acquire shared strategies and materials from a cooperative team, which can enlarge their professional expertise. Then when the team draw conclusion from students’ learning data, they can come up with wide range of solutions or plans for future improvement.

Confirming the research above, teacher’s motivation, a strong common school mission, teacher’s partnership and having a growth mindset are four vital aspects for building an effective PLC. Teachers who have high self-efficacy are more resilient. They accept new ideas and approaches to develop their abilities and skills. These teachers possess a growth mindset that welcomes challenge and has a good ability of self-examination. These teachers’ coalitions can create a sustainable common mission for their school and make efforts to achieve their goals. Teachers’ motivation can also be encouraged by team work and produce a significant positive effect on teacher’s
vigor, especially when they combine school missions with their personal aim.

**Summary**

Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a widely acceptable community that help teachers’ professional growth. However, different views of PLC can form a variety of learning communities and impact on teachers’ learning. The common sense about PLC is that teachers’ learning is to achieve a high level of student learning; teachers need to work based on students’ study performance data. Teachers who have a growth mindset are likely to meet challenges and overcome difficulties during new processes of learning, while teachers who have a fixed mindset are afraid of being pushed out of their comfort zone, and they are willing to maintain usual routines. It is clear that establishing a clear, common school mission is a basic element for establishing a strong PLC for the school. After a principal has discussions with all the teachers, they should collectively come up with a shared mission (the purpose of school) and teaching activities that have a future vision about the school that teachers want to build. Once establishing a shared mission, school staffs can divide the work to individually set stages of goals along with a timeline for tracking stage improvement as a collaborative team.
Chapter 3: Procedures & Methods

Description of the Research Design

This present study examined the reasons why some teachers are unwilling or cannot engage in PLC (Professional Learning Communities) activities. Participants who are Vancouver Island University (VIU) teachers were asked and be willing to complete a survey online. The survey included open-answer questions about their teaching practice and their sense of PLC activities. The research data in this study is based on statistical survey results and analyzed to determine the reasons impacting teachers’ participation in PLC activities. Further, it examines which parts of PLCs that teachers want to change or improve, and their suggestions. Participants needed to complete a survey online that was four questions. The survey used an attitude rating scale and open-answer questions to measure participants’ preference of PLCs and collect data of reasons what are obstacles that avoid them engaging in PLC activities. Participants were also asked about what they want to learn from PLCs and what suggestions they might have about the improvement of PLCs.

Description of the participants

The population for this study consisted of teachers who could access Survey Monkey and complete the survey. They were teachers at VIU teaching at different levels in the education faculty. They were all over 18 years old and included various genders and ethnic groups. Their gender, age, ethnicity will not be identifiable in the data. Thirty-eight participants were expected to take part. Based on their response to the consent request, the sample size is 11.
The sampling criteria for the study required that the participants: 1) each be currently a teacher or professor; 2) each willing to participate in this study; 3) each willing to complete the consent form and online questionnaire.

**Description of the Instruments Used**

Participants were given a questionnaire that asked them to answer questions associated with their own experience of PLC activities. The survey was created and delivered through Survey Monkey, a website for forming surveys, gathering responses, and analyzing the results. The survey was sent to participants by email, and as a website link. There are 31 survey templates and 15 types of questions can be chosen on Survey Monkey, such as multiple choice answers, rating scales and 3 matrix type questions. Participants’ responses were recorded via the Survey Monkey website.

**Explanation of the Procedures Followed**

Participants finished the survey during the month of November 2018. Before completing the survey, the potential participants read a brief summary of the purpose of the study and they were informed that their contribution of the study would be completely voluntary and unidentified. Data was gathered from the survey via the survey monkey platform in November of VIU instructors who volunteered to participate in this study. Participants’ emails were collected from faculty of education emails on the VIU website by clicking on “Employee Directory”, then using the “Department” tab and the “Education Faculty” Tab.

Potential participants received an email asking them to take part in the research. If they choose to take part in the study, they could participate in it by simply clicking
the link the researcher provided at the end of invitation letter. As all of this was done online, they could participate in the study wherever they had Internet connection, such as in their homes, at the university, and/or in a computer lab. They could also complete the survey through their smart phone by a web link or an email.

The consent form is at the start of the online survey questionnaires, and participants had to read the consent form and can only click YES button to continue the survey. They could withdraw their consent to participate at any time without providing a reason before the submission of the online survey. Withdrawing from the research would not be possible after the survey has been submitted, because it is anonymous.

**Discussion of Validity**

Data was gathered from the survey on Survey Monkey, including four questions with teachers in VIU Educational Department who volunteered to participate in this study. Firstly, the Descriptive Statistics to classify teacher’s favorite level For PLCs (question 1 in the online survey). Then the data was divided into two groups. The first group is the data that teachers not likely to engage in PLCs, while the second group is the data that teachers are willing to do it. The data of the first group was analyzed through coding to identity the repeating themes, and then investigating the number of themes (question 2, 3, 4 in the online survey).

The survey spanned across the age, gender and grades of the teachers so these facts would not affect the resulting data. Additionally, it was hoped that the open-ended survey questions would help participants to pay deep and personal
responses from their own experience to answer the questions. The close-ended question allows participants to rate quantitatively and sensitively on a 0 to 10 scale about their feeling on PLC activities.

**Description and Justification of Analysis Methods**

After the completion of online survey, the data was organized into an exportable MS Excel file by Survey Monkey. This researcher categorized the percentages of teachers’ engagement of PLC activities. The percentages can show effectiveness of PLC implement. Question 2 was coded to identify the repeating themes to classify different reasons that affect teachers’ involvement. Participants’ gender, age and background was not considered in the process. Moreover, participants’ perspective about the PLCs was summarized to show relationships between PLCs and teachers. the patterns of participants opinions summed up to discover ways to improve PLCs.
Chapter 4: Results and Finding

Introduction

The present study intended to explore the reasons of teacher’s non-involvement in PLCs and teachers’ suggestions about PLCs improvement. For evaluating PLC implement among teachers, the researcher conducted an online survey to answer the following research questions: The first question: *How much are you likely to engage in PLCs?* - participants who gave a negative answer to the first question can answer the second questions: The second question: *What are the reasons for you to not like to engage in Professional Learning Community activities?* All participants were expected to answer the third and the forth questions. The third question: *What do you wish to gain from participating in PLCs?* The fourth question: *Can you give some suggestions that how can PLCs be improved to adapt to teacher’s needs?*

The online survey received eleven anonymous responses from VIU instructors and professors in the educational faculty on November 30th, out of thirty-eight email invitations, which demonstrates a return rate of 29%. There were two of these responses that were not completed, while nine of them were completed and were effectively used for analysis in this study, which are summarized in the following section.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Figure one below summarizes participants’ favourite level of PLCs. These showed not one choice of “Very Unlikely”. The proportion of participants who choose “Likely” is 44% (four participants), while the percentage of teachers who are “very
likely” to engage in PLCs is 22% (two participants). These two parts of participants equal a percentage of 66%, which means more than half of the participants are eager to devote themselves to PLCs. In contrast, the percentage of teachers who are not likely to participate in PLCs is 11% (one participant) which is the lowest percentage result. In addition, there are 22% of participants who chose “neutral” (two participants). The overall responses for “likely” is absolute majority, whilst, the responses for “very unlikely” is the least.

![Bar chart showing participants' responses to likelihood of participating in PLCs.]

*Figure 4.1. Participants’ favourite level of PLCs.*

Figure two illustrates some factors that would affect teacher’s engagement in PLCs. There are six factors that were predicted by the researcher. After these six factors the researcher also provided participants the opportunity to write down their own reasons which will be described blow as well.

“I do not trust my school leaders” is one of the major reasons that cause negative
effects on teachers’ engagement in PLCs, which around 33% teachers (one participant) choose this reason. Another cause chosen by 33% participants (one participant) is “I like to work alone”. “I am too busy with teaching tasks” is also a primary cause of teachers’ un-involvement of PLCs, which around 33% teachers (one participant) choose it. In contrast, other three factors, like “I want to have more time with my family after teaching”; “I think PLC activities are useless”, and “It occupies my leisure time” have significantly low effect on teachers’ engagement in PLCs, which none of them were chosen by participant.

Except the reason listed above, 22% participants (two participants) left their own reasons, which are affected by their team members. One participant thinks whether they can focus on PLC activities depends on the people in the group, while another participant gets used to work with a certain small team in the university. There are two common responses below: A. Will depends on the group of people in the PLC; B. I work quiet independently with a small team of colleagues with very focused intentions.
Qualitative Data Analysis

All participants were asked to respond to two open-ended questions after they were questioned for the reason of un-engagement in PLCs, which was about what they want to gain from PLCs and their suggestions about implementation of PLCs to adapt to teachers’ needs (the third and fourth questions in the survey). Eight out of eleven participants (73%) provided qualitative responses in these two questions.

At first glance, the responses of the third question were grouped into four: those who want to collaboratively work with their team, those who want to develop their professional skills, those who are concerned about common goals, and those who seek innovation. The descriptive answers are illustrated in table 4.1. Professional Development occupies 38% in all response (answered by three participants), which is the largest percentage of the answer. In contrast, Common Goal is mentioned one time (12.5%). Reading carefully, some words repeat several times in the replies, which can
show teachers’ focus on PLCs. For example, out of eight responses, colleagues and learning are mentioned five times. Improve/enhancement/enhancing are revealed four times in the responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>The number of Participants</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“A collaborative working Team. “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“Shared understanding, collaboration between colleagues/courses, professional learning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I hope to learn from and with colleagues and deepen my understanding of teaching and learning. I look for ways to improve my practice.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>“I would like to learn from my colleagues and improve my practice.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“continued professional development and connections.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Goal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“An understanding of what colleagues are doing in their practice with the possible enhancement of my own teaching. I would also like working with colleagues on a common goal.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Innovation

“New ideas and strategies for enhancing learning.”
“Innovative ideas for teaching and learning.”

Table 4.1. Responses what teachers want to acquire from PLCs.

Table 4.2 illustrates teachers’ suggestions about implementing PLCs to serve teachers’ needs. Leadership, common mission, time arrangement, teacher’s awareness and the form of PLC are participants’ concern. The data show 38% participants (three participants) focus on time management problem. Teachers pay attention to time flexibilities, how to arrange PLC activities within school time instead of after teaching time, and how to organize common time for the team working together. The data show 25% teachers (two participants) believe that when teachers have more opportunities to make decisions and have more administrative support, the PLCs can be more appropriate for teachers. In addition, common mission is demonstrated by 11% participant (one participant) as a booster of PLCs. Another 11% participant (one participant) states that teacher’s awareness of positive result on individual of PLCs can be a motivation of teacher’s engagement in the learning activities. The last suggestion presented by final 11% of the participants (one participant) is visual exemplars, but the participant had not demonstrated the reason of this advice.

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<th>Theme</th>
<th>The Number of Participants</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Teachers need to ‘own’ the problem. Often the</td>
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</table>
work of PLC’s come from a top down initiative and buy in becomes difficult.”

“More administrative support for implementing decisions/initiatives. Specific outcomes for the learning.”

<table>
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<th>Common Mission</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Ensure that their purpose is clear to the group before the invitations are issued. And if the book(s) is prescribed, is there choice or room to negotiate?”</td>
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<th>Time Arrangement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Flexibility with time is important, as too is the ability for the group to set their own goals and agenda. I think where PLC topics are dictated to a group, there is less buy in and so they are less effective.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Allow for some school time (not after day of teaching). Give teachers voice in regard to choosing topics. Food is always good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The most important thing needed for PLCs to run is shared time. Time that all participants have free to work together. I also think it is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
important that the PLC group can decide for it

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher’s Awareness</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>“Making teachers are aware of the research showing the positive outcomes of PLC work on individuals.”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Visual exemplars to be included with text.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2. PLC implement suggestions from participants.

**Conclusion**

The return rate of this study is 29%, and 82% of these participants fully completed the survey. Most participants take part in professional learning communities, but there are 33% of the participants who feel that they hardly engage in it. The major reasons of non-engagement are issues around time management, school leadership and collaborative group work. Each of the reasons for not taking part in PLC are selected by 33% participants. Qualitative data showed participants’ willingness of learning and suggestions for implementation of PLCs. The suggestions of implementation of PLC provided by participants overlap with the reasons mentioned above. They are empowering teachers, building effective co-operative team, creating school common mission and time management skills.
Chapter 5 Summary and Conclusions

Brief Summary of the Study

This study explored teacher’s engagement in PLC activities and collected teacher’s views about how to improve PLCs. It considered teachers’ challenges of participating in PLC activities for their professional growth as well as teachers’ willingness of using learning programs for progress. This study targeted on the subsequent research question: what are the reasons for you to not like to engage in professional learning community activities?

To analyze all the research questions through an online survey, the researcher looked for potential participants of university professors in the education faculty listed on the VIU website in November of 2018. In the same month, thirty-eight participants received invitational emails. The survey link was offered to the participants in the invitational emails.

In November 30th of 2018, the online survey collected eleven anonymous responses from VIU education faculty staff, and nine out of eleven participants provided the responses for all the questions.

Discussion

Participants were required to rank their favorite level of PLC activities on a five-level Likert scale. Although the majority of participants believe they are willing to contribute their time and energy into PLCs (66%, see Figure 4.1), 33% of participants feel that they cannot or it is difficult to bring themselves into professional learning, which is enough to get the researcher’s attention. What are the concerns of
teachers and how to optimize the PLCs’ function? This will be discussed below under five categories: time management, collaboration, leadership, professional growth and common mission.

**Time management.** This reason of non-engagement was given by 33% participants is “I am too busy with teaching tasks.” (see Figure 4.2). It indicates the importance of time bound issues in teacher’s professional development. For creating a professional learning community, school leaders need to invest and arrange time into teachers for their preparation and work-imbedded specialised growth. Dufour and Dufour (2012) illustrated that time management should be included in goal setting. With intense teaching tasks, teachers always feel a lack of time, therefore, how to provide time to the team without rising teachers’ pressure and reducing students studying time is a primary issue. Dufour and Dufour (2012) suggested that teachers can have time studying together with some small adjustments. For example, some professional learning teams in some schools agree with extending their daily work by a few minutes (ten minutes) per day, then the teacher teams can get fifty minutes for collaboration work per week. However, extending teaching time for some classes may disturbing a teacher’s teaching routine/pace, so it may increase a teacher’s preparation time for the class. Hence, another solution is necessary. If a school provides students with specific subject classes at the same time in a grade, then school leaders can schedule group studying for specific teachers, such as art teachers, language teachers, mathematic teachers and music teachers. Dufour and Dufour (2012) also mentioned it as Parallel Scheduling. Except time management, collaboration is another reason that
teachers cannot take part in the PLCs.

**Collaboration.** 33% participants declared that “I like to work alone” (see Figure 4.2), another two participants left qualitative data that they like to work in a certain small group or that it depends on the team members in the group. According to the survey, teachers meet problems with collaboration. One reason may be the personality of the teacher, for example the participants who stated that he/she likes to work alone. Another reason may be that communicating with a group of people is more difficult than interacting with several individuals. Some teachers have already formed their comfort zone with certain colleagues, therefore they barely want to change out of this comfort zone. However, Eaker and Dufour (2002) stated that launching collaborative teams is an essential stage for PLCs, because teachers can share common goals, value and information to make progress together of helping students achieving high level of learning. Teachers are expected valuable learning experience and effective feedback from their colleagues through collaboration.

Although some participants are likely to work alone, while some teachers prefer to work with certain small teams, collaboration and learning from colleagues were declared five times out of eight responses (see Table 4.1). Hence, there is a potential development of collaborative team in PLCs. Teachers with a growth mindset regard feedback as opportunities of self-examination and they are open to other ideas (Dweck, 2012). Therefore, developing a growth mindset in teaching can help teachers focus on making improvement and expand their potential through collaborative work instead of worrying about team members in the teams. In addition, for creating
opportunities for educators’ cooperation, principals can contribute leadership among teachers to build coalition team (Dufour & Dufour, 2012). Building strong PLCs need a new role for teachers as well as principals who are also playing crucial role in teachers’ professional learning environment.

**Leadership.** Leadership crisis was the reason of teachers’ unengaged in PLCs acknowledged by 33% of the participants. They stated it as “I do not trust my school leaders.” Wilson (2016) strongly showed principals’ influences on their teachers’ learning culture. For exerting principals’ maximum positive impact for PLCs, principals need to gain the trust from teachers first. At that point, school leaders can shape effective systems for teachers to work cooperatively on a common mission, vision and goals for reform. The role of school leaders needs to be shifted from decision-maker to host in order to empower teachers to lead the team to promote everyone’s contribution to PLCs.

As shown by responses from participants, they want teachers to own the problem and to see a shift of a top-down school system (see table 4.2). Educators need a sense of being connected to their co-workers and administrators within professional learning communities that school leaders are essential to help them grow as leaders. In this view, an effective collaborative team is where teachers are granted to be leaders. When teachers bring up their own problems in PLCs, they are inspired to be ready to find solutions. Therefore, empowerment of teachers is a trigger for enhancing teachers’ engagement in professional learning activities to inspire teachers contributing to overall improvement and taking responsibilities of students’ high
result of learning.

**Common mission.** Common goal was released one time out of eight responses (see Table 4.1), meanwhile, it was stated three times in Figure four out of eight responses. They were presented as “working with colleagues on a common goal”, “setting group own goal”, “group purpose” and “group can decide for it”. Professional learning is always a collaborative process, thus building a clear common mission is a foundation of creating a strong professional learning community in the school. Dufour and Dufour (2012) stated that vision, collective commitments and goals are three supports for achieving a school mission. Similarly, Eaker and Dufour (2002) claimed that shared mission, vision, values and goals is the first step of formula a PLC conceptual framework. Furthermore, if teachers accept school goals as their personal goals and values, they can be motivated and are more likely to absorb in professional learning activities (Thoonen et al., 2011). Therefore, at the beginning of building PLCs, principals need to organize teachers to come up with strong common missions that including what school teachers want to generate and work in. Then goals with detailed actions for fulfilling the common school mission need to be set.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to embed an active common mission in the school. It can be a consistent process through out one or several years. An effective school mission is simple and easy to recall presented on the school website and on a wall in front of the school, or on a notice board where everyone can see it. If necessary, it can be displayed in the classrooms and teachers’ offices. Furthermore, teachers are still going to ignore it, if it is a statement created only by school leaders. It means
principals need to transform their roles from making the decisions around school mission to everyone on the staff contributing good ideas to its creation. Principals with new roles listen to the teachers and communicate with them to form a real common school mission with all teachers’ effort to encourage every staff in the school work on the mission because it is what they want in the future. School leaders may be surprised at the willingness of teachers’ professional growth.

**Professional growth and innovation.** The researcher combined professional growth and innovation, because positive innovation is a form of growth. Moreover, teachers need to break through their comfort zone and fixed mindset to experience both growth and innovation. These are the top attributes teachers want to acquire from professional learning communities, as they are mentioned six times out of eight responses (see Table 4.1). Participants stated their enthusiasm as “improve my practice,” “continue professional development and connections,” “enhancement of my own teaching,” “new ideas and strategies,” and “innovative ideas”. Most of the participants believe that their intelligence and abilities are improved by making efforts, which they are willing to strive for—this is called a growth mindset (Dweck, 2012). The innovation is more like a result of professional growth, because when people are willing to make an effort to update their skills and abilities, they are more flexible, productive and innovated.

For developing a growth mindset for further professional development, educators need to be clear of their original knowledge categories and then open to new information, creating more perspective finally (Dweck, 2014). Labeling and
relabeling is a process of creation, since it needs to re-arrange things in new ways. It also requires deep thinking and change from linear thinking. Teachers who are open to new information are likely to commit themselves to the collaborative work where is the place of various kind of opinions and values. The thinking of “I can work with a certain small group” can be broken, because teachers pay more attention to the situation and the context by a new mindset. And instead, teachers may find lots of qualities they can learn from their other colleagues outside their small group with observing the co-worker in great details. Risks and challenges are also welcomed with the willingness of growth and making innovation.

**Limitations**

There were some limitations in the current study. Firstly, the sample size is very small. All instructors and professors of the VIU educational faulty received an invitation email (thirty-eight people in total) on the November in 2018. 29% of teachers replied to this study’s invitation, with 71% of the teaching population not identifying their experience of professional learning communities. Consequently, the result of this study can not be generalized to a global context, different school districts or different teaching levels.

Due to preserving confidentiality, demographic information was not considered in this study, such as age and gender. Teachers’ gender, age and the years of experience on teaching context can impact teachers’ perspective toward professional learning. These factors were not counted in, although they may influence teachers’ engagement in PLCs.
Furthermore, there are location limitations in this study which was based on VIU teachers only which can only demonstrate features of VIU’s professional learning community (but because of small sample size, it may hardly demonstrate VIU’s PLC). Different provinces in Canada are diverse in terms of culture, economy, values and educational views, not to mention other countries. Diversity in all areas has an impact on educators and education, so more studies are needed to be conducted, if the improvement of PLCs is a goal of this area of research.

Restriction of the researcher’s mindset is another limitation of the study. The researcher had a proposal before the survey and analyzation, therefore, the survey design was based on the thesis proposal. Although the researcher tried to think as comprehensively as possible, there are boundaries in it. For example, only teachers were considered in the study, where school leaders are also crucial to PLC development. Moreover, the way to ask questions is hard to change within short period of time, which can limit participants’ responses. Teachers’ definitions of PLCs are not considered in the study which should be considered in future research, because the difference of definition can lead to diverse actions and responses.

**Suggestions for future research**

Although the concept of professional learning community has been proposed for several decades, the result of its effectiveness is hard to evaluate. The reason may be the rapid changing of contemporary educational environment. It is also difficult to evaluate because of different perspectives of professional learning as well as there being no standard assessment of PLC program effectiveness. All teachers’ concerns in
this study is worthy of further research, like how to arrange time for teachers’ learning, how to empower teachers, how to embed common mission among educators and how to develop teachers’ inquiry mindset. However, some participants’ personal information may be needed to be collected such as gender and age. Further study needs to be conducted throughout more areas, or at least focus on one school district, to make the study more effective. This research only examined teachers’ experience and ideas from an online survey. The observing and participating of real professional learning communities is necessary for further study for collecting more first-hand information with practical experience. Additionally, current literature does not have a clear model contributing to collaborative forms where teachers need to be empowered to be leaders. Further research is needed for studying on leadership systems that involves responsibility, collaboration, empowerment and transmuting that into high student accomplishment.

Conclusion

The implementation and improvement of PLCs should be important work for wide-ranging educators. There is an understanding found in this study that time management, collaboration, empowerment, common mission and growth mindset are essential factors of professional learning communities. The majority of teachers are willing to fully engage in PLCs, therefore, finding the ways of effectively implementing PLCs are significant and meaningful for teachers’ growth. Cultivating a growth mindset is the beginning of establishing teachers’ group studying. Teachers owning a growth mindset are likely to meet risks and challenges which are common
in a new learning setting. Implanting a strong, effective, and common mission schoolwide is a foundation of PLCs, because it is a supportive pillar for collaborative work. Time management is a primary challenge in professional learning because it is not easy to arrange a period of time that suitable for a group of people with busy teaching tasks. Collaboration is a foundation of PLCs, since the core spirit of teachers’ professional learning group is sharing common goals and learning from others. Empowering teachers can be an active way to create a collaborative work group. When teachers own their “own problem”, they are ready more engaged in solving it. Further studies should avoid the limitations of this study and researchers should consider a larger number of participants, collect more practical first-hand information on active PLCs and study over a larger geographic area.
References


Appendix A -- Invitation Letter

Dear:

Welcome to this academic research study!

My name is Zhen Tao and I am a student in the Master of Educational Leadership at Vancouver Island University (VIU). I am requesting your participation in an online survey about Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). This online survey will take 5 to 10 minutes.

My study, entitled Why Some Teachers are not Likely to Engage in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) That Are Designed for Teachers’ Professional Development to Help Them Adapt to Educational Innovation aims to research reasons why teachers may or may not engage in PLCs. I hope my research will help for PLCs activities’ improvement in terms of its structure, schedule and format.

An information letter that gives you detailed information and instructions about this study will be presented at the beginning of the questionnaire. Please read it carefully before starting the questionnaire questions. If you consent to participate in this study, please check the box below and click “Yes” button to continue the survey.

If you have questions, please contact me by email at taozhen1609@163.com. If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethic Board by telephone at 250-740-6631 or by email at reb@viu.ca.

If you meet the criteria, please complete and submit the online survey by simple
clicking the link below. Your opinions are important!

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BMW77HZ

With sincere Gratitude for your participation.

_____________________

MEDL Student Zhen Tao

Faculty of Education

Vancouver Island University
Appendix B – Consent Form

Why Some Teachers are not Likely to Engage in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) That Are Designed for Teachers’ Professional Development to Help Them Adapt to Educational Innovation?

Principal Investigator
Zhen Tao, Student Researcher
Master of Educational Leadership
Vancouver Island University
Taozhen1609@163.com

Student Supervisor
Dr. John Phipps
Professor in Faculty of Education - Graduate Programs
John.Phipps@viu.ca

I am a student in the Master of Education in Educational Leadership at Vancouver Island University (VIU). My research, entitled “Why Some Teachers are not Likely to Engage in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) That Are Designed for Teachers’ Professional Development to Help Them Adapt to Educational Innovation?”

The purpose of this study is to research reasons why some teachers do not engage in PLCs. I hope my research can help make a progress for PLCs structure, schedule and format.

The sampling criteria for every potential participant are that: 1) each is currently the teacher or professor; 2) each is willing to participate in this study; 3) each is
willing to complete the consent form and online questionnaire.

If you would be willing to participate in my research, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire via the SurveyMonkey website. Questionnaire data will be stored on SurveyMonkey’s servers located in USA, and thus is subject to SurveyMonkey’s data privacy policies and foreign legislation. For information on SurveyMonkey’s privacy policy, see /www.surveymonkey.com/mp/legal/privacy-policy/.

The nature of this online questionnaire is completely anonymous, so the risk of your questionnaire responses being identifiable is extremely unlikely.

All the questionnaire responses will be stored in my SurveyMonkey account. Only I will be able to access this account by the unique password. After the data collection, the electronic data will be on my password-protected laptop. The data on the SurveyMonkey website and in my laptop will be stored until I finish my these, approximately May 31st, 2019. I will not collect any personally identifiable information, including Internet Protocol (IP) addresses.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can refuse to take part in the survey at any time prior to the submission of the survey, because it’s anonymous, withdrawal from the research would not be possible after the survey has been submitted. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.
by click this box, you confirm that you have read and understand the information provided above, and hereby consent to participate in this research under these terms.
Appendix C – Survey

This survey is based on your personal experience and feelings about Professional Learning Communities’ (PLCs) activities. The goal of this survey is to (a) explore whether the current PLCs activities in your school are suitable for you or not and (b) make possible improvements to current PLCs activities.

1. How much are you likely to engage in PLCs? Please choose a number to show your favorite level of PLCs. 1 means “very unlikely”; 2 means “not likely”; 3 means “neutral”; 4 means “likely” and 5 means “very likely”.

   1                2                3                4                5
   Very Unlikely   Not Likely      Neutral        Likely       Very Likely

2. If, in Question #1 above, you stated that you do not engage in PLCs (1 – “very unlikely” or 2 – “not likely”), what are the reasons for you to not like to engage in professional learning community activities? [If you felt that you always like Professional Learning activities, you can skip this question.]

   A. I am too busy with teaching tasks.
   B. I want to have more time with my family after teaching.
   C. I think PLC activities are useless.
   D. I like to work alone.
   E. I do not trust my school leader.
   F. It occupies my leisure time.
G. Other reason (write down your reason and choose a number to show how it
   effect you) _____________________________________________

3. What do you wish to gain from participating in PLCs?

4. Can you give some suggestions that how can PLCs be improved to adapt to
teachers’ needs?