PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES : THAI EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

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Abstract- This qualitative research was designed to synthesize concept and principle of characteristics of professional learning communities in Thai educational context. This phenomenological study used narrative inquiry to collect data. The research finding revealed five characteristics of professional learning communities in Thai educational context included (1) shared visions, values, and norms; (2) collective learning and collaboration; (3) focus on student learning; (4) professional reflective dialogue; and (5) shared leadership. Each characteristics were examined through positive and negative lenses to gain a deeper understanding of ways to most successfully influence the establishment of professional learning communities in Thailand.

Keywords- Professional Learning Communities / Thai Educational Context

I. INTRODUCTION

The biggest challenge facing education today is high universal standard and academic success of students which increase complexity of educational reform. So, the professional learning communities (PLCs) become a powerful tool for that phenomenon and spreading in the international realm as a new model of professional development. And it positively influence on enhancing students' achievement and teachers' development (Blasé and Kirdy, 2010) which the quality of education is an essential indicator.

The enhancing the quality of education to achieve the high standard in Thailand was called for educational policy reform by the government and practitioners toward learning society and professional learning communities. The international evidences indicate that whole school system need to adapt and change in the term of reculturing and restructuring. Essentially, PLCs members are committed to learning and improving the organization at all times (Dufour, 2004). The traditional climate of isolation was transited to the collaborative climate which culture and atmosphere would be improved which is the most important steps of implementing an effective PLCs (Mathews et al., 2014). According to Xiao & Saedah (2015), the interactions of teacher peers are vary necessary to perfect the process and outcomes of teaching and learning. Therefore, the continuums of teachers learning, reculturing, and restricting the school system were supporting the development of school wide PLCs where teacher professional practices were transforming to the new era in Thailand. Hence, PLCs process is a part of social change.

The turning school systems into PLCs is also biggest challenge for principal and teachers who affected directly on operation. It vary widely in practice, especially between the developed and developing countries. For this reason, this research project attempted to identify the characteristics of PLCs in Thai educational context from the stakeholders' perspective the most important impact factor to successfully establishment the PLCs.

II. DETAILS AND PROCEDURES

2.1 Purpose and Literature Review

The study was a qualitative research with the objective to synthesize the concept and the principle of characteristics of professional learning communities in Thai educational context. The theoretical framework were analyzed and synthesized by 5 main concepts;

Table1: Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

Characteristics	Concept
Shared Visions, Values and Norms	- common goal & mission - common ideology - common technical knowledge and formative approaches - climate of trust and proximity - atmosphere of caring
Collective learning and collaboration	- collective inquiry - co-operate working - collaboration among principal and teachers
Focus on Student's Learning	- students' accomplishment - result-oriented goal - benchmarks of students' work
Professional Reflective Dialogue	- reflection in action - share & feedback - interrelation - coaching - mentoring - advising
Shared Leadership	- authority - decentralization - decision making - democratic conception

Table2: Reference of Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

Characteristics	Reference
Shared Visions, Values and Norms	Morrissey (2000), Hipp & Huffman (2003), Harris & Muijs (2005), Bolam et al. (2005), Stoll et al. (2006), Cannata (2007), Dufour and Marzano (2011), Kenoyer (2012), Mathrews et al (2014), Xiao & Saedah (2015)
Collective learning and collaboration	Kwanman (2003), Seashores et al. (2003), Harris & Muijs (2005), Bolam et al. (2005), McLaughlin and Talbert, (2006), Senge (2006),Stoll et al. (2006), Cannata (2007), Feger & Arruda (2008), Robert and Pruitt (2008), Leclerc Moreau & Clement (2010), Lunenburg (2010), Kenoyer (2012), Mathews, Xiao & Saedah (2015)
Focus on Student's Learning	Bolam et al. (2005), Stoll et al. (2006), Cannata (2007), Feger & Arruda (2008), Hord et al (2009), Shipley (2006), Xiao & Saedah (2015)
Professional Reflective Dialogue	Harris & Muijs (2005), Bolam et al. (2005), Stoll et al. (2006), Reeves (2010), Holt & Arrambide (2014), Mathews, Holt & Arrambide (2014)
Shared Leadership	Hipp & Huffman (2003), Mulford & Sallins (2003), Harris & Muijs (2005), Bolam et al. (2005), Giles & Hargreaves (2006), Spillane (2006), Stoll et al. (2006), Shipley (2006), Valentile (2006), Cannata (2007), McLaughlin & Talbert (2007), Feger and Arruda (2008), Cormier and Olivier (2009), Leclerc, Moreau & Clement (2010), Leclerc, Moreau & Clement (2010), Kenoyer (2012), Kenoyer (2012), Xiao & Saedah (2015)

2.2 Methods and Procedures

The research gathered data through interview and observation were designed to generate responses that provide a deeper understanding of stakeholders' perspectives and perceptions of PLCs which consisted of principals, vice-principals, teachers and parents. The in-dept interviews were collected by two educational policy experts, two school management experts and two scholars in discussion about important and effect of PLCs characteristics that are commonly found in the scholarly literature. The non-participation observation was at the best practice school in Thailand, Plern Pattana School where have had experience with and has excelled in the implementing effective PLCs. The content analysis was used to analyze the data by triangulation technique and were sorted into five catagories of characteristics.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results revealed five characteristics of professional learning communities in Thai educational context included (1) shared visions, values, and norms; (2) collective learning and collaboration; (3) focus on student learning; (4) professional reflective dialogue; and (5) managerial shared leadership.

3.1. Shared Visions, Values, and Norms

Shared Visions revealed the code of principal and teachers to perform the common goal in two dimensions. First, students' learning dimension indicate that the first priority of school operation and improvement should be the students' learning enhancement. (Morrissey, 2000; Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Bolam et al., 2005; Harris & Muijs, 2005; Stoll et al., 2006). Second, teachers' learning dimension indicate that teacher professional development is common mission among all school member. The teachers should participate in policy making and decision making related to instructional development and learning strategy for enhancing teachers' performance effectively. (Hipp & Huffman, 2003; Kenoyer, 2012)

Share Values revealed an empirical characteristics of professional learning communities in Thailand that differ markedly from the theoretical categorization of previous research results and evidences. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that teachers perceive common ideology belong to the Thai society and beliefs. The first value concern on teachers' belief and perception which teachers' profession has direct impact on student's learning. So, teacher must attend and play the major role for student's learning and contribute the effective instructional techniques and strategies continuously using any method in any circumstances at any time with their colleagues (Hipp & Huffman, 2003). The second value concern on social' belief and perception which teachers' profession has high value for social change and country development. In this point, teacher is as very important dynamic for enhancing country competition on behalf of an knowledge and innovative contributor in the knowledge society (Xiao & Saedah, 2015). This result also has consequences for further research into professional learning communities in Thailand as it clearly shows that from perspective of teachers in connection to teachers' concrete values and social values.

Shred Norms utilized the notions of principal and teachers to perform their sense to be a mere part of the school. They must have the common technical knowledge and formative approaches which focus on integrated working, collective decision, and co-operation in professional activities (Xiao and Saedah, 2015). Moreover, The climate of trust and proximity described an open and comfortable environment which determined in professional learning communities (Morrissey, 2000; Mathews, Holt & Arrambide, 2014). The open communication is significantly positive factor in establishing trust among teachers and positively influencing student achievement (Dufour and Marzano, 2011). Additionally, teachers become closer to others in classrooms located in closer physical proximity than to others. It noted that principal is influential in building trust, having power to change, creating climate and opportunities for teachers to engage in school operation and activities.

3.2 Collective Learning and Collaboration

The collective learning and collaboration is the heart of professional learning communities which teachers must interact with others for sharing and supporting

the professional work and development continuously throughout active professional learning activities for instance collective planning and problem solving, observation and recording in the classroom, reflecting and sharing (Bolam et al., 2005).

The result suggests that the participation and collaboration in collective learning and collaboration differ to the overseas point of views. It is striking that the model of collective learning and collaborative activities is demanded differentially in Thailand. Traditionally, teachers have chance to share and learn particularly most in activities as attending courses, meeting, and training which fall short of helping teachers learn how to teach for understanding. Instead, effective teachers' professional learning and collaboration is social in nature which is also widely addressed as a new approach and required in the schools (Kwanman, 2003). It strongly connected to professional goal which demand teachers to involve in the decision-making process and strike for continuous improvement upon their ideas (Lunenburg, 2010).

According to Seashores et al. (2003), sharing individuals' actions can build a common culture which develop continued collaboration in more substantiated knowledge ways. It is going into dept on topic of teachers' performance connections with others outside classroom is as important as ensuring their performance and actions in their classrooms by evaluation and measurement of students' results and teacher professional learning (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006).

Hence, PLCs need principal, teachers, students, parents and other community numbers together to establish and maintain that they should apply appropriate dialogues and conversations on topics related to school improvement (Robert and Pruitt, 2008). In Addition, The collective inquiry and action research is the meaningful tool to contribute collaborative atmosphere and to achieve the better results for the students.

3.3 Focus on Student's Learning

Many other researchers described PLCs as a powerful environment where teachers work and interact with others to achieve the common goal of student accomplishment (Hord et al., 2009). This approach focus on results-oriented goal setting for each member of the organization in order to achieve the high levels of learning for all students. Teachers are expected to work inter-dependently to achieve agreed upon common goals that are focused primarily on student's learning (Xiao & Saedah, 2015).

In order to gain the effective student learning outcomes, teachers should have the orientation conduct their actions and behaviors. They must keep open minds to accept new ideas and conceptions which can help professionally. They also should have benchmarks to evaluate qualities of students' work for analyzing students' advantages and disadvantages in the learning process so teachers can adapt suitable tactics to improve student learning.

In addition, the process of student learning improvement, teachers should pay more attention to supervise other colleagues in related to student's main outcomes, beneficent standard and goal for different students to achieve.

3.4 Professional Reflective Dialogue

Professional reflective dialogue among principal and teachers is not very common in the school in Thailand. The study shows that individual reflection and reflection in action take place rather informally. So, teachers do reflect but not in ways in which they make use of explicit feedback from colleagues or students.

The focus of reform into PLCs should start to shift from this traditional approach to a modern approach focusing more on teacher efficacy where they can share and feedback with each other their institutional practices and ideas to improve the quality of instruction on the current institutional practices, global changes, job pressures, fierce competition, new technical skill. It could be moved away from excuses or blame other performance to improve the important creative ways. According to Reeves (2010), The students achievement gains were significant when teachers come together to engage in deep discussions about planning, implementing instructional strategies, and monitoring student results.

Therefore, the effective professional reflective dialogue in Thailand should focus on the interrelation and mutual responsibilities of 3 development dimensions; teacher development, student development, and school development. When they consider that the student and organization development have positive influence on their individual development, they will try their best to work effectively.

3.5 Shared Leadership in Management

The principal play the major role in PLCs so their leadership style requires an adequate infrastructure for professional learning communities as supportive condition (Leclerc et al., 2010; Feger and Arruda, 2008, Xiao & Saedah ,2015). It concerns structural and cultural changes within schools that provide interaction and reflection for create strong professional learning communities where a good leadership is significant catalyzer aspect to attain the goal and developing the qualities of every aspect of PLCs (Shipley, 2006; Valentile, 2006). Stoll et al. (2006) suggested that changes in senior leadership of schools appear to be a factor, so increasing attention is being paid to the potential of leadership succession planning to help maintain PLCs sustainability. Principal and teachers need work cooperatively to build and develop the school system by shared leadership in management.

Many researches revealed that shared leadership has positively influence for principal and teachers to share their authorities, ideas and determines for attaining the schools' vision (Cormier and Olivier, 2009).

In operation, The principal should decentralize their authority that stimulates the successfulness of shared leadership, but it is decided by the leaders' perceptions and minds. According to Hord and Sommers (2008), PLCs must have the important and necessary factors including authority, power, and decision making to be shared and inspired. Hence, the principal need to develop the democratic conceptions and behaviors to share power and adopt the valuable suggestions from their teachers which are contributed for the effective shared leadership (Cormier and Olivier, 2009).

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The finding of this study provide very practical qualitative element that expand existing research on the characteristics of PLCs. This study identified, from stakeholders' perspectives, the guideline for transforming schools into the professional learning communities through developing school management policy which was based on decentralization principle for supporting teacher leaders, developing school culture for creating collegial culture, and developing profession teachers focusing on pedagogy development for enhancing student's learning outcome and achievement effectively.

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