

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS IN ASIA AND TURNAROUND SCHOOLS IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

In an era of accountability and increasing demands of student achievement and school reform, professional learning communities (PLCs) have been implemented in the United States and have resulted in the transformation of schools. However, PLCs remain scarce in international schools worldwide despite the emerging interest and significant results in the implementation of PLC process. This paper aimed at examining teachers' global perspectives on the role of PLCs in increasing student achievement, enhancing teacher collaboration, and improving instructional climate in international schools in Asia and turnaround schools in the United States. Narrative and thematic analysis research design was employed. The study revealed the impact of PLCs in the educational transformation and the challenges in its implementation. The teachers' global perspectives on PLCs were categorized in sixteen themes which have been grouped into four overarching themes, namely, (a) the focus on student results, (b) focus on teacher collaboration, (c) focus on instructional climate, and the (d) PLC challenges and solutions. Additionally, the practice of PLC encounters various challenges, including insufficient time and resources, conflicts, resistance to change, amount of workload and tasks, and the lack of trust. Teachers identified the solutions to these challenges to have a successful implementation of PLCs.

Keywords: Professional Learning Community (PLC), Teacher Collaboration, International School, Turnaround School, Narrative Analysis, Qualitative Research.

INTRODUCTION

Educational reform has ultimately hinged on the capacity of teachers to realize the importance of changes in their teaching practices around the globe (Luyten & Bazo, 2019). Building a high functioning professional learning community is considered the single most effective way to elevate the quality of instruction and to maximize learning for all students. PLCs have been identified by many as one of the most promising strategies and best hope for sustained school improvement. With two decades of experience as a result, there is now strong evidence that the implementation of PLCs, data-driven PLCs in particular, have had positive effects on student learning outcomes (Barr, 2017). In the study conducted by Bennett (2017), it was found out that teachers participation in PLC had a favorable impact on student academic achievement. The mission of the PLC is to improve student learning. It is not enough for a PLC to focus on whether the students were taught or are given an opportunity to learn; rather PLCs must remain focused on ensuring that all students learn and at high levels (DuFour, et al., 2016). Thus, the need to build a high-functioning PLC

culture that improves the instructional climate, promotes teacher collaboration, and increases student achievement. It is a moral obligation of all educators to provide the best quality education to every child in the world. Over the last two decade, more schools in the United States and international schools worldwide implemented the PLC process to have structures in place to facilitate teacher collaboration, to focus on results and learning, to make students college ready and equipped for global careers. Policy makers, researchers, and practitioners are leaning more towards the PLC concept because of its focus on teachers' collective efforts towards student learning and teachers' professional development (Zheng et al., 2016). However, Chua et al. (2020) stated that PLC studies in the Asian Chinese nations remain scarce despite the emerging interest in the practice of PLC beyond the Western context. This study aimed to determine the following: 1) the role of PLCs in improving student achievement, teacher collaboration, and instructional climate and 2) challenges in implementing PLCs and the solutions to these challenges. The findings of this study would shed light in the enhancement of teachers' professional practices and the global implementation of PLCs in international school and public school setting.

METHODS

The study used qualitative research design using the narrative and thematic analysis approaches to gather global perspectives of educators on the role of PLCs in student achievement, teacher collaboration, and instructional climate in international schools in Asia and turnaround schools in the United States. To understand teachers' beliefs or perceptions of the PLC concept and its implementation on their campus, a narrative analysis was chosen for this research study because a new viewpoint on a professional development like the PLC concept appears promising (Eyanagho, 2019). Shetty (2020) stated that the general recommendation for in-depth interviews is to have a sample size of 20-30. The number of participants in a study should matter less, and the depth in which a participant's experiences are understood, analyzed, and represented should matter more. With this in mind, the researcher set his sample size at 24 educators who are currently K-12 subject teachers in international schools in Asia and in turnaround schools in the United States. As shown in **Figure 1**, the participants have global teaching experiences from 23 countries and 22 out of 24 participants have taught in at least two countries.

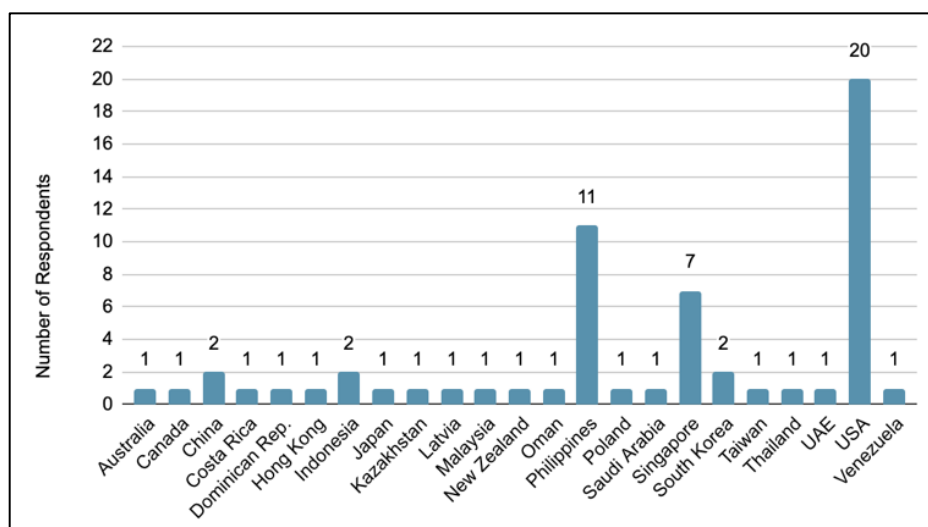


Figure 1: Countries Taught by the Respondents

In this study, understanding participants' common experiences are pivotal to develop a deeper understanding of the features of PLC practices and the challenges in its implementation. The researcher selected participants who have a wide range of knowledge in the implementation of PLC work in the 4 core subjects. Twenty-two out of 24 respondents have taught in at least 2 countries as shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Participants Demographic Background

Participants	Subject	Countries Taught
Teacher 1	Math	Dominican Republic, Malaysia, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, USA
Teacher 2	Social Studies	Canada, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore
Teacher 3	ELA	Singapore, USA
Teacher 4	Math	United Arab Emirates, USA
Teacher 5	ELA	USA
Teacher 6	Math	USA
Teacher 7	Science	Philippines and the USA
Teacher 8	Math	Philippines and the USA
Teacher 9	Math	China, Japan, Thailand, USA, Venezuela
Teacher 10	ELA	Philippines and the USA
Teacher 11	All subjects	Singapore and the USA
Teacher 12	Math	Philippines and the USA
Teacher 13	Science	Philippines and the USA
Teacher 14	Math	Indonesia and the USA
Teacher 15	ELA	Philippines and the USA
Teacher 16	Science	Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Philippines
Teacher 17	Math	Australia, China, Oman
Teacher 18	Math	Costa Rica, South Korea, Singapore, USA
Teacher 19	Science	Philippines and the USA
Teacher 20	Science	Philippines and the USA
Teacher 21	Math	Hong Kong, Latvia, USA
Teacher 22	Math	Taiwan and Singapore
Teacher 23	Math	Philippines and the USA
Teacher 24	Math	Poland, Singapore, and the USA

The participants of this study comprised of K-12 core subject teachers, 12 teachers from international schools in Asia and 12 teachers from turnaround schools in the United States. The 24 participants of this study are currently teaching in 9 public schools in the United States and in 7 international schools in Asia as shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Participating International and Public Schools

School Name	Location
Cholee Lake Elementary School	Florida, USA
Glades Central Community HS	Florida, USA
Hong Kong International School	Hong Kong, China
Huntington Park Institute of Applied Medicine	California, USA
International School of Beijing	Beijing, China
Jakarta Intercultural School	Jakarta, Indonesia
KEC/Canal Point Elementary	Florida, USA
La Vista High School	California, USA
Nagoya International School	Nagoya, Japan
Nazarbayev Intellectual School of Physics and Mathematics	Shymkent, Kazakhstan
San Carlos High School	Arizona, USA
San Fernando High School	California, USA
School of Social Justice @ Marquez High School	California, USA
Seminole Ridge High School	Florida, USA
Shanghai American School	Shanghai, China
Singapore American School	Singapore

The instruments for this research were open-ended format interview questionnaires through Google forms, personal interviews, or online interviews. The interviews were directed toward the respondents' perspectives and personal experiences about PLC implementation. The focus was on student achievement, teacher collaboration, instructional climate, and challenges in implementing PLCs. The interview questions are as follows:

1. Focus on student results
 - 1.1 Through the implementation of the PLC, what are the significant results in your students' achievements?
 - 1.2 What PLC team activities effectively improve student achievement? Discuss any intervention and enrichment plans you are implementing.

- 1.3 Explain how teachers utilize student progress data at your school. Discuss how the use of data has impacted student learning.
2. Focus on teacher collaboration
 - 2.1 In what ways does the PLC support the professional learning of teachers?
 - 2.2 How does PLC enhance teachers' collaboration?
3. Focus on instructional climate
 - 3.1 What instructional climate does PLC provide for both teachers and students?
 - 3.2 What PLC team activities effectively improve teaching strategies?
 - 3.3 From your perspective, what leadership practices do you think encourages a collaborative culture and discourages teacher isolation within the school environment?
4. PLC challenges and solutions
 - 4.1 In your opinion, what do you think constitutes the greatest challenge in your PLC?
 - 4.2 How does your PLC address the greatest challenge you mentioned?

The first three interview questions addressed the focus on student results, the next two questions addressed the focus on teacher collaboration, the next three questions addressed the focus on instructional climate, and the last two questions addressed the challenges and solutions in implementing PLCs. As a protocol in conducting a dissertation study, the researcher secured a letter from the university where the researcher is taking his Doctor of Philosophy degree. After which, the researcher emailed the 24 respondents enclosing the online Google Form survey questions for respondent profiling. The questions for the interview were enclosed in the email and based on their preference, respondents completed the Google form interview questionnaires or sign up for the personal interview or Google Meet interview schedules based on their preferred time. The interviews were conducted in 15 to 20 minutes to determine their perspectives on the role of PLCs in student achievement, teacher collaboration, instructional climates, and challenge in implementing PLCs. After collecting the interview data, the researcher used pseudonyms Teacher 1 to Teacher 24 to avoid the identification of the interviewees. The data collected for this research study were systematically organized to find common themes throughout the survey responses. The teachers' global perspectives on PLCs were categorized in sixteen themes which have been grouped into four overarching themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher analyzed the collected interview data to create themes of teachers' global perspectives on the role of PLC in student achievement, teacher collaboration, instructional climate, and the challenges in implementing PLCs. The analysis of the interview data revealed and reflected the perceptions, experiences, successes, and challenges of the individual members of a specific content PLC. As shown in **Table 3**, the analysis of the identified sixteen themes, which have been grouped into four overarching themes in accordance with the research questions. The collected data were analyzed inductively to generate four overarching themes of teachers' perceptions of their work in PLCs: 1) focus on student results, 2) focus on teacher collaboration, 3) focus on instructional climate, and 4) PLC challenges and solutions. The data collected from this study showed teachers' perceptions of their involvement and the impact that the PLC activities have in supporting student learning. The data were analyzed to examine how PLC members characterize PLC practices that most directly lead to student learning.

Table 3: Teachers' Global Perspectives on PLCs

Overarching Theme 1: PLC: A Focus on Student Results
Theme 1.1: PLCs Boost Student Achievement Theme 1.2: PLCs Promote Positive Learning Experiences Theme 1.3: Data-Informed Instructional Decisions Theme 1.4: Response to Intervention and Instruction (RtI ²)
Overarching Theme 2: PLC: A Focus on Teacher Collaboration
Theme 2.1: PLC: A Venue of Sharing Best Practices Theme 2.2: Creating Structure for Collaboration Theme 2.3: Strengthening the Core Program Theme 2.4: Performing Instructional Rounds and Classroom Walkthroughs
Overarching Theme 3: PLC: A Focus on Instructional Climate
Theme 3.1: Building a Culture of Trust, Mutual Respect, and Fairness Theme 3.2: Creating a High Level of Engagement in Teaching and Learning Theme 3.3: Promoting Shared Leadership and Decision-Making
Overarching Theme 4: PLC Challenges and Solutions
Theme 4.1: Insufficient Time and Resources Theme 4.2: Addressing Conflict Theme 4.3: Resistance to Change Theme 4.4: Amount of Workload and Tasks Theme 4.5: Lack of Trust

Overarching Theme 1: PLC: A Focus on Student Results. Teachers' responses to the interview questions offered the impact of PLC work and its focus on student results. The core mission of PLC is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that all students learn at the optimum level.

Theme 1.1: PLCs boost student achievement

Through the implementation of the PLC work, significant results in students' achievement were observed. There is a wide range of evidence using multiple metrics and benchmarks that show significant improvement of student learning that are quantifiable or not. Positive student results include significant improvement on standardized assessments, proficiency rates, graduation rates,

college acceptance rates, attendance rates, and the quality of class engagement and involvement in deeper learning experiences. In mathematics, teachers shared the significant math achievement results observed in their classes. *As a result of the PLC implementation, our students get to experience lessons that are more engaging and motivating, so they learn and enjoy math more. Over 90% of our students are able to meet or exceed the standards on our common assessments (Teacher 1, 2021).*

In English and Language Arts, teachers shared the significant results observed in their classes. *When all factors of PLC implementation are followed through, then we see that there are learning gains in students' performance. For example, in our English Learners (EL) levels there are visible gains of proficiency in students from level to level. You can see some progress. Level 1 students begin to have growth in their reading from a year before from Beginning Reader (BR) to now at scores of 150 or above (Teacher 5, 2021).*

With the implementation of PLC, schoolwide results were also observed in other metrics and benchmarks including the lower dropout rates, higher graduation rates, increase in college and university acceptance rates, and the school's overall rating improvement. *Through the implementation of the Professional Learning Community, some of the significant results in our students' achievements include: improvement of our school Letter Grade from F (Failing) to a high C, more graduates applied and got accepted to colleges and universities, more involvement in state-wide competitions, increased student spirit, lower dropout rate, 100% graduation rate and lesser need of credit recovery classes (Teacher 13, 2021).*

Theme 1.2: PLCs promote positive learning experiences

Through the implementation of the PLC work, one of the focuses is ensuring that students have positive learning experiences in the classrooms. For the students to have positive learning experiences in all classrooms, teachers need to have a schoolwide guaranteed and viable curriculum giving all children equal opportunity to learn essential content. *Our PLC plans and uses common assessments, so we are all responsible for helping all of our students achieve at a high level. Because of this, the PLC shares ideas and materials for the best ways in which to teach students or provide support for students who are struggling. I believe the PLC magnifies my ability to provide a rich range of materials and support to my students (Teacher 1, 2021).*

Beyond student achievement, one of the focus of PLCs is for the students to have positive learning experiences and be able to participate in deeper learning where students think critically, communicate, and collaborate with others effectively. *In my current setting, we are not looking for student achievements per se but the flow of student relationships--how they connect, problem solve, and collaborate. I think the results of working in a PLC, ultimately, was to make sure that children do not "fall through the cracks". Likewise, it was a good reminder to help support the children who were beyond grade level expectations (Teacher 11, 2021).*

Theme 1.3: Data-informed instructional decisions

PLC work gives emphasis on analyzing student data to improve the quality of instruction and to improve student success. The use of student data to drive instruction allows teachers to tailor their

teaching methods to encourage student achievement. Data-driven instruction looks at the whole picture and uses dynamic student data so teachers can make specific adjustments to the curricula to improve student understanding. Common formative assessments are team designed and used to monitor student attainment of essential learning targets throughout the instructional process. The most important benefit of using common formative assessments is the consistency of educational experience that it provides. *Whenever my PLC meets to discuss assessments, both formative and summative, we are focused on preparing lessons and tasks that are designed to help students meet expectations on our standards. We reflect on previous tasks and openly and honestly discuss whether or not the task allowed for student success. If the previous task did not allow for this, we collaborate to revise the assessment so that it aligns closely with the targeted standard and allows for student success (Teacher 1, 2021).*

Reflecting on the student results, teachers engage and reflect on what topics are needed to reteach to solidify students' understanding. *In our math department, we analyze each student's progress by going into the data after we all administered the interim assessment. We focus on the lessons that the majority of our students struggled and we created some class activities to improve their understanding of the concept ...so that when we move forward to the next lesson, there will be no more learning gaps between our students (Teacher 12, 2021).* Teachers may need to create resources and activities to reinforce the skills that students didn't fully acquire. *Teachers adjust their lesson and assessment based on the student progress data. Data greatly impacted student learning by the type of lessons and tasks given to them. Data would dictate teachers that type of enrichment activities and support the students need for their classes (Teacher 13, 2021).*

Theme 1.4: Response to intervention and instruction

Response to Intervention and Instruction is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of all students. The PLC work gives emphasis on the universal high-quality instruction, implementing intervention, and providing enrichment plans to ensure that all students maximize their learning. The goal of the PLC is to intervene and provide enrichment to ensure that all students are learning at the optimum level. All students receive high-quality instruction provided by qualified personnel to ensure that students' difficulties are not due to inadequate instruction. All students are screened on a periodic basis to establish academic baseline and identify struggling students who need additional support. *My PLC aims to design lessons and assessments that prepare students for optimal success at meeting the standards. We collaborate with the Learning Support PLC to design modified versions of assessments to accommodate those students who need more support. Additionally, we design tasks that allow for students to earn exemplary results on learning tasks and assessments. We are very deliberate in our planning for intervention and enrichment (Teacher 2, 2019).* Members of the PLC must regularly and systematically examine the four critical questions of a PLC within their team. One of the questions is: How will we extend and enrich the learning for students who are already proficient?. PLC's focus is not only providing intervention to struggling students but also providing enrichment for students who are already proficient. Enrichment activities may include using programs that are accessible to all students and manageable for teachers. *For enrichment, we add extension level problems to our daily lessons and we have set up Khan Academy classes that some students can choose to join. In that class, we assign units on topics at grade level that we will not have time to teach and we assign units above level to allow students to accelerate so that they can qualify for placement in more advanced*

courses next year (Teacher 1, 2021). Optional and additional extension questions are also provided to the proficient students. *Our PLC provides additional enrichment questions provided on eligible students, rewarding the eligible students including verbal recognitions, certificates, medals, and digital badges (Teacher 7, 2021).* PLCs administer a pre-assessment at the beginning of each unit to determine what standards students already mastered. Teachers use this assessment results in differentiating the instructions, providing targeted intervention and enrichment. Students who demonstrated mastery of the standards in the pre-assessment are provided with different teaching and learning experiences to further advance their learning.

Overarching Theme 2: PLC: A Focus on Teacher Collaboration. Teachers responses to the interview questions offered the impact of PLC work on teacher collaboration. The second big idea of a PLC is that collaboration is the key to looking at educational best practices and student results.

Theme 2.1 PLC: A venue of sharing best practices

In PLCs, teachers work collaboratively and able to collectively identify the best approaches to teaching and learning. Through PLC, learn from one another and learn the latest innovations and approaches that enhance the teaching and learning experiences. There is no innovation without collaboration. When teachers work collaboratively, they are able to collectively identify the best approach to teaching and learning. *PLCs are great ways for teachers to learn from each other. For example, one of our PLC members had experience with standards-based grading rubrics and helped the team learn how to make and use them. Another member had never seen the diamond method for factoring and learned that from the team. A third team member did some summer PD on instructional routines and numbers talks, and shared that learning with our team (Teacher 1, 2021). PLC is a venue where teachers contribute, share teaching expertise, and share new ideas with colleagues to enhance student learning (Teacher 8, 2021). It is an awesome avenue for teachers to share their best teaching practices, their teaching tools used in delivering instruction and their other useful teaching, counselling, and support resources (Teacher 7, 2021). PLC serves as a venue for teachers to share best practices. During PLC meetings, teachers can express their ideas and opinions on the what, why, and how of teaching and learning (Teacher 20, 2021). I believe PLC's have been great professional learning opportunities for teachers as they de-privatize our classrooms and allow for conversations around best practice and the sharing of ideas and resources (Teacher 17, 2021).*

Through PLC, teachers learn latest innovations and approaches that enhance the teaching and learning experiences. *PLC enhances teacher collaboration because as a team we are able to troubleshoot as well as learn and support each other in areas of need as professionals. Again, based on our current circumstances our collaboration has helped teachers immensely by learning new programs that we can use in classroom online. We improve our toolbox by sharing best practices with each other (Teacher 5, 2021). PLC is a venue for teachers to be more creative and reflective. Teachers become more confident in sharing their successes and failures. They become more open-minded as well. It's a place to celebrate successes and also for decision making (Teacher 13, 2021).*

Teachers found that learning from their PLC members are more powerful than attending professional development trainings provided in different settings. *I have found learning from other*

professionals to be far more powerful than learning from professional development meetings. At times, the presenters from some professional development meetings are not educators and they don't have the experience necessary to provide support we need (Teacher 6, 2021). PLCs have supported professional development. Teachers, new and experienced alike learn from others' input and insights. Coaches and lead teachers facilitate the meetings, give echo-trainings, and lead the data analysis process (Teacher 15, 2021).

Theme 2.2: Creating structure of teacher collaboration

PLCs create a community of professionals by establishing structures for teacher collaboration that encouraged a collaborative culture and discouraged teacher isolation. “Divide and conquer” culture allows teachers to work together in accomplishing the tasks efficiently by tapping on every teachers’ strengths and expertise. PLCs need to create structures for teacher collaboration that encouraged a collaborative culture and discouraged teacher isolation. *I think that when you meet and plan regularly, you learn to trust and depend on each other, and the more you do that, the more you are willing to share ideas and share the workload, which ultimately lightens the load for everyone on the PLC (Teacher 1, 2021). We meet regularly (bimonthly). It is a great opportunity to discuss curriculum, standards, teaching practices, concerns with students including how to help them meet standards possible enrichment and intervention activities (Teacher 7, 2021). We are supposed to meet twice in a four day cycle, but as we are near, we often talk on a daily basis. As a PLC, our collaboration is enhanced through sharing of ideas, planning together, discussing students' work, etc. (Teacher 14, 2021).*

The leadership team and PLC members must decide to have a structured and common collaborative time during the school day for PLC members to effectively collaborate. *Common planning time is important so that teachers have time to meet in their PLCs during school time (Teacher 4, 2021). Providing common planning time in the school day. Providing a space where teachers can collaborate (Teacher 21, 2021). Teachers and administrators convene regularly and engage in open dialogue. Our school operates on the premise that teachers' must collaborate. With PLC, teachers' are empowered all the more. Teachers also work in teams in developing learning resources (Teacher 16, 2021).*

Theme 2.3: Strengthening the core program

PLC work focuses on strengthening the core program by creating viable and guaranteed curriculum. A guaranteed and viable curriculum provides students with access to the same essential learning outcomes regardless of the teacher to whom they are assigned. *Our PLC plans and implements standard-based instruction. This activity consists of the following steps: unpacking the standard to create learning targets; data analysis and reflection based on the focused standard; planning for learning activities that are aligned with the demands of the learning target, planning for the monitoring techniques, and formative assessments (Teacher 10, 2021). Our Grade 6 PLC work is critical for identifying critical standards and learning outcomes by unit and for the year, as well as for establishing good instructional practices and methods to meet student needs and maximize results. By identifying and agreeing upon our standards prior to beginning our units of instruction, we can not only maximize our use of time, but also can better*

help students to see our overall vision for the year and the connection between concepts (Teacher 22, 2021).

PLCs work on aligning lessons and implementing various teaching strategies that fit the needs of students. *I think that without a PLC, teacher collaboration would be very minimal. Whenever I am working, even on my own, I am thinking about how my work may impact my PLC. I openly share my ideas and work with my PLC because I like the fact that we are in alignment on our lesson planning and assessment. I've worked with PLCs in the past where this was not the case. It can create confusion and even conflict. This of course never benefits the students. I think a healthy PLC collaborates with a focus on how their work will positively benefit student performance (Teacher 2, 2021). The PLC provides consistency in what is being taught and assessed. We plan together, use similar lessons, but each of us put our own spin on the instruction: the students are receiving instruction on the same material, but in a slightly different presentation (Teacher 14, 2021).*

Theme 2.4: Participating in instructional rounds and classroom walkthroughs

Instructional rounds and classroom walkthroughs are great ways for PLC members to gain valuable insights into their professional practices. *Allowing time for classroom visits and/or peer observation is great in improving the quality of teaching and learning. Co-teaching is another great way to share and learn strategies. Our PLC has a support teacher who co-teaches with some of our team and she helps "cross-pollinate" good ideas (Teacher 1, 2021). Classroom observations on specific lessons to observe strategies being modelled is an amazing way to improve teaching strategies (Teacher 5, 2021). Co-teaching models, peer observations and providing feedback to colleagues are powerful ways in elevating the quality of instruction (Teacher 13, 2021). Teachers agreed that through peer observations, teachers grow professionally by identifying their individual professional areas of strength and weaknesses. Teachers would be more likely to take active steps towards improving their teaching practices. I think that peer observations definitely improve teaching strategies because it helps to learn from others. Also, the feedback provided to the teacher being observed is also beneficial (Teacher 6, 2021). I would say peer observations and instructional rounds if done with due diligence and fidelity will significantly improve the quality of instruction at school (Teacher 7, 2021). One of the most valuable ways to improve teaching strategies, that we lack on our team, is taking the time to be present in each other's classrooms observing and learning from each other (Teacher 24, 2021).*

Overarching Theme 3: PLC: A Focus on Instructional Climate: Teacher's responses to the interview questions offered the impact of PLC work on instructional climate.

Theme 3.1: Building a culture of trust, mutual respect, and fairness

PLCs focus on building a community of professionals based on trust, mutual respect, and fairness which allow teachers to openly discuss what's working well and what's not working well with their teaching. Sharing of ideas and experiences comes naturally and teachers don't feel that they are being judged and evaluated. Teachers need to work together in building a learning community based on trust, respect, and fairness. *PLCs need to invest in establishing a climate of trust and respect. When this is present, teachers are more willing to openly discuss what's working well and*

what is not working well with their teaching. The art of teaching can be very personal, and often teachers can feel intimidated by their peers. When the expectations are very high of them, this can create a stressful environment (Teacher 1, 2021). Our PLC works together very well - there is mutual respect for each other's knowledge and ability. I feel this allows us to plan together easily and discuss any differences to reach a conclusion so the students will receive a strong lesson that has both members of the PLC's input (Teacher 14, 2021). It helps build a culture of trust and respect; camaraderie and collaboration (Teacher 7, 2021). I believe when trust and honesty are present in PLC's teacher collaboration is greatly enhanced as they provide teachers an opportunity to have deeper conversations about student learning (Teacher 17, 2021).

Theme 3.2: Creating a high level of engagement in teaching and learning

PLCs develop lessons and implement instructional strategies that creates a high level of engagement. Working collaboratively, teachers thoughtfully design lessons that allow students to actively engage and participate in inquiry-based activities. PLCs develop lessons and implement instructional strategies that creates a high level of engagement. Working collaboratively, teachers thoughtfully design lessons that allow students to actively engage and participate in inquiry-based activities. *I can usually tell when PLCs are impacting student performance positively by the level of engagement that I see in student learning. Lessons are thoughtfully designed by a team of teachers rather than just individual ones, students feel supported and their work is intentional and authentic. This positive climate can be felt by the school community (Teacher 2, 2021). PLCs implement common curriculum and assessments and delivery of lessons vary from classroom to classroom. During PLC meetings, teachers brainstorm on different instructional strategies and they decide what is the most appropriate for the specific lessons and needs of students. PLC work gives students the chance to see a larger variety of instructional strategies and methods in the classroom. This benefits students because the teacher may discover a method that works really well with a student that the teacher didn't think about previously (Teacher 4, 2021). Effective PLC practices support the professional learning of teachers. PLC could develop the level of content knowledge of the teachers, discover innovative strategies to teach the essential standards, conduct data analysis , and create learning experiences that would promote student engagement. PLC could also build a strong community learners, collaborative culture, and collective responsibility for achieving goals (Teacher 10, 2021).*

Theme 3.3: Promoting shared leadership and decision-making

PLC leads, instructional leaders, and administrators need to work collaboratively in decision-making, creating structures, and communicating the vision of the PLC. Administrative and leadership team support is essential for the PLC to function effectively. For PLCs to function effectively, administrators and teachers need to work collaboratively in decision-making, creating structures, and communicating the vision of the PLC. Administrative and leadership team support is essential for the PLC to function effectively. *Leadership is necessary to create a supportive PLC school where teachers feel safe, supported, and encouraged to share and learn with their colleagues. If a PLC team is dysfunctional, it is important that leadership intervenes to provide the necessary support. Without this, the PLC is sure to fail and teachers revert back to isolation. From my perspective, leadership practices that are support and non-evaluative tend to be successful. However, sometimes leaders need to address the source of the problem (Teacher 2,*

2021). *Providing for some leadership structures within the PLC is likely to be helpful like having a PLC leader, for example). I ultimately think it is most helpful if leadership has been in the classroom in recent history, and has actively participated as a teacher in a teaching PLC. This would provide the utmost perspective on how to help lead a school forward using PLCs (Teacher 11, 2019).*

Creating structures for teams and groupings is a crucial shared decision that both teachers and administrators need to make to ensure positive collaboration. *My school's PLC groupings enable teachers to customize instructions addressing the needs of the specific group of students assigned to each PLC group. Additionally, learning facilitators are assigned to these PLC's. They serve as conduits between the district and the school (Teacher 23, 2021). Shared leadership and teacher empowerment are what encourages the collaborative culture at our school. Also subject heads are routinely changed annually. Teachers are given special tasks including coordinator of action research or lesson study and these teachers coordinate with other teachers. I noticed that no teacher is isolated as teachers always work in teams. The role of each member in the team is specified (Teacher 16, 2021). The leadership practices that promote shared responsibility, individual agency, and independent voice help to encourage a collaborative culture. Invitations to participate and acknowledge strengths also help promote a positive collaborative environment (Teacher 18, 2021).*

Overarching Theme 4: PLC Challenges and Solutions

Teacher's responses to the interview questions displayed some key indicators that could constitute a challenge in the implementation of PLCs. Teachers also explained and suggested possible solutions to the challenges encountered in their PLCs.

Theme 4.1: Insufficient time and resources

The availability of time and resources is the most prominent challenge that affects the effectiveness of PLC implementation. *As teachers we often complain, rightfully so, about lack of time to complete tasks. However, PLC structures make life easier for all involved by sharing the burden and allows teachers to be more efficient in their work (Teacher 4, 2021). The amount of time to discuss and plan for all the necessary items (Teacher 10, 2021). Time is the greatest challenge. Students have different paces and speed of learning concepts. So data sometimes gets delayed due to time (Teacher 13, 2021). Time is a challenge! It seems there are always more topics we'd like to cover, but to cover the topics deep enough for us to feel the students understand, we usually cut something out (Teacher 14, 2021). PLCs find solutions to address the challenge on insufficient available time for teachers to meet and plan. Teachers set a common PLC meeting time embedded within the instructional time where they plan weekly or monthly. *Regular meetings and purposeful scheduling of classes and planning period minimize the challenge (Teacher 13, 2021). Some teachers scheduled their PLC meetings before school or during lunch time. We addressed the challenge with common planning time by agreeing to meet before school (Teacher 3, 2021). PLC meetings are usually done at lunch time (Teacher 20, 2021). Some teachers also have the flexibility to meet on a certain day out of classroom. Usually, my school or district will allow us to take a certain day out of the classroom to collaborate (Teacher 19, 2021). Teachers are also strategic and purposeful when meeting. Sharing the agenda before the meetings and staying on the task during**

the meetings help them accomplish the PLC work. *We look at what is essential and make sure these are covered. When we have to cut something out, it's usually a duel with pistols. We talk about what we both feel can be cut, or covered lightly. Usually we look at 7th grade to see what is covered deeply there and if there is something we can do a lighter introduction in 6th grade (Teacher 14, 2021).*

Theme 4.2: Addressing conflict

Conflict occurs when people disagree or have differing philosophies or views on certain topics. Destructive conflict in PLCs can bring down the morale of teachers. *We sometimes have different ideas philosophically and this can lead to conflict. At times we don't agree on what standards we should teach or on the types of questions we want on an assessment (or what an assessment should look like), and we need to discuss and "argue it out" (Teacher 1, 2021). I am part of 2 PLCs. In one PLC there is a member that is quite accusatory at times, and this shuts down the conversation and leads to hurt feelings (Teacher 3, 2021).*

Conflict is essential in the PLC process but teachers need to learn how to navigate the conflict. *In these cases, we talk through the options and ideas and we try to reach a compromise everyone can live with. When it is really hard, we have invited a coach or administrator to join our meeting to help facilitate or guide the discussion (Teacher 1, 2021). When conflict arises, PLC members must acknowledge all perspectives and learn to resolve the conflict as a team. Respecting the opinion, demonstrate awareness and try to have a positive attitude. (Teacher 8, 2021). Support from peers and coaches, and open dialogues and honest communication during PLCs help clear some perspectives (Teacher 15, 2021). We worked hard to build trust within the team during the first semester, and now try to ensure that we spend more time at the onset of each unit comparing anticipated challenges and what has worked well for us in the past. In this way, we can still benefit from the great new practices that our new teacher brings to the PLC (Teacher 22, 2021).*

Theme 4.3: Resistance to change

PLCs often encounter resistance to change among its members and this can impede the benefits of PLC framework. *Some teachers are not open minded and not ready to make some changes or adjustments in their teaching (Teacher 12, 2021). Reluctance to change or trying new things as well as personalizing data results is a problem we encounter in our PLC (Teacher 5, 2021). Individual teachers are reluctant to participate in open classroom observations (Teacher 9, 2021). I think the lack of buy-in from all teachers poses the biggest challenge. There are still some teachers who are hesitant to change practices and get out of their comfort zone. The next challenge is maintaining fidelity and ensuring that the practices we have started are maintained throughout the school year. Finally, teachers do not get sufficient professional development and training for new programs or projects being implemented (Teacher 15, 2021). This challenge on resistance to change can be addressed effectively by engaging administrators, PLC leaders, teachers in communicating the PLC vision and mission. Constant redirection to the vision and mission of our school reminds teachers of the focus of their PLC work and this results to teachers buy-in (Teacher 5, 2021). Knowing the common goal for the group is the key to fight this challenge (Teacher 12, 2021).*

Theme 4.4: Amount of workload and tasks

Teacher responsibilities extends beyond the four walls of the classroom and sometimes the amount of workload and tasks are just overwhelming. *The greatest challenge to our PLC is focusing on the many tasks and issues that we can address in such a finite period of time. We have to prioritize what we focus on and unfortunately we cannot do everything (Teacher 4, 2021). Work can sometimes be so overwhelming (Teacher 23, 2021). When the workload is not shared by each member. While each person contributes something meaningful, it is often the case that certain members end up doing more (Teacher 21, 2021). I think that administration puts an odd amount of "requirements" on the team meeting times, which ultimately get in the way of the necessary goal of looking at student work and designing "next steps" for students. That PLC "cycle" I've mentioned above is more often than not interrupted and extended by all sorts of other requirements, that ultimately make it impossible to complete the cycle. Looking at student work must be done quickly, otherwise it is irrelevant, the student has grown and you haven't had time to plan or implement the proper interventions (Teacher 11, 2021).*

PLCs work collaboratively and efficiently by tapping on individual teacher's strengths to accomplish the workload and tasks. *Teachers often divide up larger-scale tasks into smaller pieces (Teacher 3, 2021). We plan together and divide up the tasks. At my school, we have a large number of students who are high achieving and receive a lot of tutoring outside of school. It is a challenge to find meaningful and engaging enrichment activities and tasks for those students to complete. We also have students who struggle and/or need time to learn what some of the other students already know. This situation creates the need to create learning opportunities tasks for ALL students in the classroom and this is a lot of work for one person to do alone. Sharing the planning and creation of lessons helps lessen the burden of one person having to do it all. We post all of our lessons on Schoology and share them there so that all teachers in our PLC can access our work (Teacher 4, 2021).*

Theme 4.5: Lack of Trust

Trust is an essential element of an effective and high-functioning PLC. Lack of trust impedes the benefit of PLC framework and will result to poor teacher collaboration and low students' achievement. PLCs need to spend the first few meetings and throughout the year to build trust within the team. *We worked hard to build trust within the team during the first semester, and now try to ensure that we spend more time at the onset of each unit comparing anticipated challenges and what has worked well for us in the past. In this way, we can still benefit from the great new practices that our new teacher brings to the PLC (Teacher 22, 2021).* Many challenges hinder the implementation and the success of the of PLCs. These challenges of a PLC can be addressed within the PLCs involving educators, instructional leaders and administrators. Marzano et al., (2017) stated that the process of becoming an effective PLC begins with re-culturing the school and changing the mindset of its members.

CONCLUSIONS

The teachers are confident to claim that Professional learning community is a driver of educational transformation that brings improvement in the teaching and learning in international schools and public schools. The ultimate purpose and mission of PLC is creating an intensive focus on learning by developing guaranteed and viable curriculum and by monitoring each student's learning. PLC work improves student learning experiences, close student achievement gaps, and increase student achievements using multiple benchmarks. Ongoing implementation of intervention and enrichment plans is essential work of PLC in improving student achievement and addressing the diverse needs of all students. PLC is a venue for sharing best instructional practices, teacher-led professional developments, and allows teachers to brainstorm, innovate, and elevate their quality of instruction. The most valuable resource that all teachers have is each other, without collaboration teacher growth is limited to their own perspectives and teachers work in isolation. Challenges exist within PLCs and teachers resolve these by creating a culture of trust, mutual respect, fairness, and having an open mind accepting different perspectives and views.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The present investigation has some limitations particularly on the sample size which was used in the study since it was only limited to 12 teachers from 7 international schools in Asia and 12 teachers from 9 public schools in the United States. To have a better generalization of the study, it is recommended to future researchers to conduct similar study. PLC implementation and action research is highly recommended in order to determine the impact of PLC implementation on school improvement and student learning in both public and private schools worldwide.

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