

Professional Learning Communities in China: Administrative Management or Teachers' Professional Development?

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Abstract: In the context of globalization, educational reforms around the world have brought new challenges to the improvement of teachers' teaching concepts and practices. How to strengthen educational administration and promote teachers' professional development have become an important issue in the field of education. Among many solutions, the establishment of professional learning communities is regarded as an important way for leaders to strengthen management and improve the professional qualities of teachers. Therefore, in the context of the continuous development of educational management, more and more school leaders and teachers are seeking a better way to establish an efficient professional learning community. This phenomenon is becoming more and more common gradually.

Keywords: PLCs (Professional Learning Communities); Administrative Management; TRGs (Teaching Research Groups); Teachers' Professional Development

Introduction

A professional learning community (PLC) is not a fixed and unchanging organization. It is in dynamic change from initial establishment to a gradual development (Song and Li, 2020). In terms of community membership, although Stoll et al. (2006) discover that shared values and visions are the primary principles of professional learning communities, Song and Li (2020) argue that the collision of different knowledge, experiences and beliefs among members often contributes new views and perspectives and provide more learning opportunities for teachers. Moreover, Zhang and Pang (2015) point out that PLCs mainly have three forms in China including Teaching Research Groups (TRGs, jiao yan zu), Lesson Preparation Groups (LPGs, bei ke zu), and Grade Groups (GGs, nian ji zu). More importantly, Zhang et al. (2016) illustrate that a teaching research group (TRG) is an important form of PLC. For example, teachers participate in regular public classes and work in teaching research groups (TRGs) with other educators. Therefore, TRG is also an important platform for collaborative work and the professional development of teachers.

Although the establishment of PLC is based on a spontaneous cooperative relationship (Harris and Jones, 2010), some studies have proved by Song and Li (2020) that it is almost impossible for a community to be completely spontaneous in the actual situation. Because the operation of PLCs needs the help of administrative power, which means that school leaders provide a supportive cooperation framework to guarantee the system and culture (Song and Li, 2020). For instance, influenced by the respect for authority in traditional Chinese culture, the "top-down" model is reflected in PLCs in China (Zhang and Yuan, 2020). In addition, Huffman et al. (2015) report that although the term "PLC" is rarely used in China, schools could improve teachers' professional skills through teacher collaboration and collective discussion. Therefore, the development of Chinese teachers' professional competence is the result of PLC's long-term efforts (Yin and Zheng, 2018). As a result, there will be a discussion on the purpose and characteristics of PLCs in China mainly administrative management or teachers' professional development.

Zhang et al. (2016) consider that most of the research literature on PLCs is in the Western context, but the research focusing on the Asian background, especially China, is very limited. Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2022) explain that because the influence of social and cultural background on PLCs is very important, the development and implementation of PLCs in non-Western contexts, such as China, need be studied. However, Qiao et al. (2017) point out that although the research interest in PLCs has increased greatly in China, the empirical study of PLCs in mainland China is still in the early stage.

Therefore, this study will compare and analyze the definitions and characteristics of PLCs in Western countries and Asian countries. Then, it will discuss the uniqueness of PLC in China taking China as the background.

Firstly, this study hopes to explore the influence of different cultures on PLCs by comparing the similarities and differences of PLCs in different social backgrounds. Secondly, it will help readers understand the historical development, current situation, characteristics, and purpose of PLCs by analyzing the characteristics of PLCs in China. Finally, this paper will conclude that both administrative management and teachers' professional development are the current situation and characteristics of PLCs in China.

1. Thematic literature review of PLCs

1.1 The meaning and definition of PLCs

There are a variety of views and insights on the definition of professional learning communities (PLC), and there is no standard consensus on the definition. This view is supported by Stoll et al. (2006), who also argues that there is no common understanding of what professional learning communities are. Because in different environments and contexts, there may be different concepts of PLCs.

1.2 The process of teachers and students progressing together

Hilliard (2012) explains that a representative professional learning community is composed of team members such as teachers. For example, they usually work together regularly and share teaching progress and skills to increase their abilities to meet their students' intellectual, social, and cultural needs. Norwich (2018) adds that educational leaders and faculty members develop skills for further collaboration within professional learning communities, providing students with the necessary support from formative and summative assessments. Therefore, Hilliard's (2012) and Norwich's (2018) interpretation is that professional learning communities, a professional learning community will gain great value if teachers and leaders work together to enhance professional development and educational experience. Similarly, Norwich (2018) concludes that a PLC is an organization in which community members adopt some collaborative approaches to improve school management and enhance student learning abilities.

Although there isn't a single definition that everyone agrees on (Stoll et al., 2006), Dogan et al. (2015) believes that PLCs have made great contributions to school reform and teaching improvement in most countries, because people are full of confidence in the development and prospects of PLCs. Moreover, Drago-Severson (2012) believes that a PLC is a cooperative organization that could help teachers improve their teaching skills and supplement teaching knowledge. More importantly, PLC is also set up to satisfy the demands of students in terms of teaching and learning (Drago-Severson, 2012). Dogan et al. (2015) supplement the definition of PLC's working mechanism. They believe that teachers could constantly adjust teaching methods through cooperative discussion according to students' performance and feedback in class, which aims to meet the diverse learning demands of students. Finally, the teaching abilities and skills of teachers will be improved in the mode of working together in PLCs.

1.3 The transition from teachers' active teaching to students' active learning

A PLC model is an organization to improve the professional knowledge and skills of teachers. Harris and Jones (2010) support this view and explain that a PLC provides a crucial platform for schools and teachers, because it allows teachers to enhance their teaching skills and strategies in cooperative communication on a continuous basis. Although many researchers believe that PLC is a professional organization produced by the improvement of teachers' teaching skills and students' learning progress (Hilliard, 2012; Norwich, 2018; Dogan et al., 2015), DuFour (2006) has some different opinions on the PLC. He reports that PLC is more concerned with students' learning than with teachers' instruction because teachers work cooperatively with each other and are ultimately responsible for the learning results of students in PLC (DuFour, 2006). This

definition of PLC originates from a statement that the most critical requirement of formal education is not just for students to receive knowledge and education passively but to learn and acquire knowledge actively (DuFour, 2006). Therefore, the transition from teacher teaching centre to student learning centre has a great impact on PLC reform and development. However, Fred et al. (2019) define the concept of PLC as educators could promote the development of their professional knowledge through PLCs, while educators react to the development of PLC. For example, they could supervise and facilitate innovation in PLC. Therefore, it can be concluded that PLC is a process of interaction between educators and PLC organizations. In Singapore and other school systems in Asia, PLCs are at an early stage in terms of concept and development. Hairon and Dimmock (2012) found that to improve students' initiative in learning and educators' innovation in curriculum reform, education policymakers found the importance of PLCs. Therefore, PLC is considered an important medium for school educators to develop curriculum and ultimately improve students' active learning.

1.4 The progress of the school

PLCs could be defined as an important organization for the development of member capacity and the improvement of the school's organizational system. Harris and Jones (2010) consider that a PLC is made up of a group of professional teachers that have strong bonds and have a good mindset. For example, they mainly play the role of driving innovation and progress within and between schools. Consequently, the PLC model has a direct positive effect on learners and school development. Similarly, Stoll et al., (2006) discuss that PLC is a collaboration between teachers and leaders in which they share their teaching experiences. The purpose is to improve the quality of school teaching and improve the effectiveness of teachers in the teaching process (Stoll et al., 2006). Therefore, it can be concluded that the development of PLC in a school plays an important role in the improvement of students' learning and the progress of the school. However, DuFour (2007) debates that the PLC model could not provide a shortcut for the development and improvement of the school. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that PLC still provides a logical concept for the development of school leadership (Harris and Jones, 2010). As a consequence, the positive working attitudes of the school educators are conducive to PLCs' continuous contribution to the development of the school. In addition, there is a lot of discussion about the scope of membership in a PLC. Although some researchers believe that only teachers are members of PLCs, Stoll et al. (2006) explore that other school staff have the same important status as teachers in most schools, and this finding is more obvious in some special schools especially. As a result, these members in the PLC play their respective functions to promote the progress of the school. In comparison, Hairon and Dimmock (2012) report that in the context of a centralized system, the traditional top-down model of Singapore still exists in teaching practice. For example, during the development of PLCs, school leaders have great autonomy to supervise and manage PLC, which means that the application of PLC in each school curriculum reform and school progress is still a great challenge in some Asian countries.

2. The characteristics and components of PLCs

2.1 Teachers' cooperation

Professional learning communities come in a variety of forms and sizes. Teachers' cooperation is one of the most prominent features of PLCs. Hilliard (2012) believes that the most popular form of PLCs in American higher education is a community that focuses on the development of community members themselves. For example, the distinctive feature of such communities is to improve the teaching abilities of teachers and the learning abilities of students through specific methods and strategies (Hilliard, 2012). Therefore, PLCs pay more attention to the teaching process of teachers. Furthermore, this conclusion is also confirmed by Dogan et al. (2015). Dogan et al. (2015) find that PLCs could help teachers improve their teaching practice experience and subject knowledge in America. Similarly, the improvement of teaching experience and topic knowledge is beneficial to the development of new teaching methods by teachers. For example, the transformation of teaching methods is usually from the traditional lecture-based teaching method to the cooperative exploration teaching

method (Dogan et al., 2015). Therefore, it could be concluded that the effective development of PLCs may enhance the good quality of trust, cooperation, and respect of teachers in the process of teaching.

However, Hairon (2020) argues that just uniting teachers may not make PLCs become an effective community. Because the teacher collaboration based on knowledge theory has not been fully implemented. In addition, Stoll et al. (2006) add that the shared goals and values of teachers are key characteristics of PLCs in the process of teachers cooperating. Because these goals and values provide the basis of collectivism and information sharing for PLCs. Although it has been proved that collaborative work in PLCs may become the best choice for teachers in school, there are still many teachers who carry out teaching work independently in the form of individuals (DuFour, 2006). To solve this problem, DuFour (2006) points out that the PLC collaboration is an organized process, in which teachers analyse teaching skills and practices dialectically, and discuss problems in class together. Furthermore, the goal is to work as a team to improve the quality of their classes and improve students' academic performance ultimately.

Research by Harris and Jones (2010), discover that to satisfy the learning requirements of students, schools need to create chances for teachers to collaborate and improve together. Therefore, Resnick (2010) reports that cooperation and communication among teachers are very important to improve students' academic performance and strengthen their learning initiative. Additionally, Stoll et al. (2006) conclude that if there is no cooperation and common goal among teachers, it is not easy to complete teaching tasks and achieve teaching results. Therefore, it would be known from the researchers' findings that professional learning communities are characterised by teacher trust and strong working relationships. However, Well and Feun (2007) point out that the establishment of a successful PLC requires will meet great challenges. For example, communication among teachers in a school and the relationship between teachers and teachers in other schools are difficult challenges. Moreover, some teachers will be resistant to or suspicious of the work of other teachers in some schools' PLCs. This requires leaders to strengthen the management and supervision of PLCs.

Even though teacher cooperation is difficult to implement, helping teachers to work cooperatively is still one of the characteristics of PLCs in some Asian countries. Hairon and Dimmock (2012) discover that learning groups were established for teachers through PLC mode in Singapore. It enables teachers to exchange knowledge and methods of teaching different subjects. As a result, Hairon and Dimmock (2012) also make a complement that such learning teams may promote curriculum reform and provide sharing and cooperation values for school development. In addition, Huffman et al. (2015) explain that a strong and positive sense of community would bring beneficial effects to individuals and organizations. For instance, this sense of community may promote trust, solidarity, and responsibility among community members. Moreover, Hairon (2020) agrees with the findings of Huffman et al. (2015). He demonstrates that PLCs' support for the collaborative work of teachers could provide spiritual and psychological support for teachers (Hairon, 2020). The purpose is to help teachers solve the challenges they face together. As a result, the characteristic of PLCs to help teachers to cooperate is a universal feature in the world.

2.2 Students' learning process

Within PLCs, it is far from enough for teachers to cooperate effectively. Harris and Jones (2010) point out that superficial cooperation among teachers could not improve students' academic performance effectively. Therefore, in the process of teacher cooperation, teachers need to pay more attention to their teaching skills and students' learning process, so that PLCs could play more effective roles. Similarly, Dogan et al. (2015) illustrate that the goal of PLCs is to improve students' learning efficiency and results. Therefore, one of the most important characteristics of PLCs is focusing on students' learning efficiency. Furthermore, Dogan et al. (2015) discover that teachers in PLCs pay more attention to the changes and progress of students' learning methods. In the same way, DuFour (2006) agrees with Dogan et al. (2015) about the characteristics of PLCs and believes that the main feature of PLCs is to provide extra help and support for students with learning difficulties. For example, PLCs will require teachers to provide extra tutoring time for students who fail to keep up with the curriculum progress, to ensure the learning effect and quality of students. Therefore, these supports for students' learning are important features of PLCs. Additionally, Harris and Jones (2010) find that schools can improve teaching strategies and curriculum practices by setting up PLCs, which has a positive effect on students' learning process. In

comparison, Stoll et al. (2006) argue that PLCs staff were responsible for students' learning. This kind of responsibility could make students feel peer pressure, turn the pressure into motivation, and promote the improvement of students' learning initiative and enthusiasm. At the same time, the responsibility may develop students' collective concepts.

2.3 Students' learning results

Dogan et al. (2015) review that PLCs usually test students' learning results through formative assessment. In other words, the value and effectiveness of PLCs could be judged through the feedback on students' learning effects. Moreover, Harris and Jones (2010) make a deeper analysis. They believed that schools could improve teaching strategies and classroom efficiency by setting up PLCs. This has a positive effect on students' learning initiative, and its purpose is to improve students' academic performance and output a good learning result. Harris and Jones (2010) also conclude that PLCs allow professional teachers to carry out reform and cooperation and improve students' learning outcomes through innovative teaching processes ultimately. Additionally, it is also supported by Stoll et al. (2006). Stoll et al., (2006) discover that there is a close relationship between PLCs and the improvement of students' academic performance because a more professional teaching team could bring students higher quality of classroom atmosphere. Consequently, Hairon (2020) concludes that PLCs are composed of teachers with common goals and values, which are to promote students' learning methods and improve their academic performance. However, the former research studies have been incomplete. For instance, Hairon and Dimmock (2012) point out that the characteristics of PLCs are to improve students' academic performance and ensure students' overall development simultaneously in Singapore. Due to the fact that even in Singapore's smaller education system, there is a finding that it is not appropriate to apply a boring and single curriculum format to every classroom. As a result, on the premise of improving students' academic performance, promoting the comprehensive development of students' skills is also one of the important characteristics of PLC.

2.4 Centralized model

Apart from the three main characteristics above, the most obvious feature of PLCs in many Asian countries is centralization. Moreover, Hairon and Dimmock (2012) discover that Singapore is in a centralized school system, which determines that school leaders and educators need to assume more responsibilities in PLCs. It means that they play key roles in curriculum innovation and reform. Therefore, leaders and educators seem to have a higher status in such centralized Asian countries. However, the research by Hairon and Dimmock (2012) does not point out the limitations of PLCs' development in Asian countries. In response to this view, Ho, Ong and Tan (2019) add that educators and school leaders have greater challenges to overcome because of the lack of PLCs' practical experience in many Asian countries. For example, the link between PLCs and improved students' learning results and teachers' motivation in class is not explicit. The reason for this challenge is that the excessive intervention of school leaders in PLCs leads to the reduced participation of teachers in PLCs (Ho, Ong and Tan, 2019). Although policymakers encourage teachers to participate in PLCs actively, the "top-down" approach is the background of education in Singapore (Hairon, 2020). In this context, teachers still work in a hierarchical work structure (Hairon and Dimmock, 2012). Finally, this hierarchical work structure has a negative impact on teachers' initiative because it is conditioned and influenced by the centralized background.

Salleh (2016) argues that another characteristic of Asian PLCs is the high status and functions of school leaders. Furthermore, Ho, Ong and Tan (2019) indicate that this characteristic originates from the history of Asian countries attaching great importance to hierarchy. For example, it is the responsibility of the leader to consider the future direction of the PLCs and to foster the quality of mutual trust and professional development among PLCs members. Therefore, Singapore's dependence on hierarchy and obedience to authority makes the characteristics of PLCs more obvious. At least, PLCs have brought innovation and progress to Singapore's education and school teaching methods. However, Bruce (2009) argues that although the method of leadership intervention was beneficial to the development of Singapore PLCs, it also has some problems. For example, Lee and Lee (2013) point out that although teachers may receive some guiding suggestions under top-down management background, it will reduce the enthusiasm and confidence of collaboration among teachers. Therefore,

Salleh (2016) concluded that PLCs in Asian countries have three common features in the world: establishing cooperative relations among teachers, promoting students' active learning, and paying attention to students' learning results. Centralization is also a major characteristic of PLCs in Asian countries.

3. The function of PLCs in leading learning

Hilliard (2012) reports that professional learning communities have a pragmatic function and could provide great value to educational institutions and organizations. Because professional learning communities help build a platform for sharing ideas, trust, and collaboration. Moreover, the goal of PLCs is to improve teachers' teaching and strengthen school management (Hilliard, 2012). Therefore, it could be concluded that the effectiveness of professional learning communities should be judged by the impact of the final teaching process on teachers and students. It is also supported by Dogan et al. (2015). They explain that PLCs are the foundation to support teacher learning and teacher management. They are also a medium of cooperation and communication between teachers (Dogan et al., 2015). For example, to see if data is up to standard based on clearly known parameters and to see and evaluate the effectiveness of a school's professional learning communities based on changes in students' and teachers' behaviours. In comparison, Stoll et al. (2006) discover that due to the complexity of leadership, people realize that leadership cannot be completed by one person or a small group gradually. PLC is a form of distributed leadership (Stoll et al., 2006). As a result, the process of cooperation between PLCs' principals and teachers, provides opportunities for teachers to play a leading role in teaching.

Clarke (2021) illustrates that the overall value and function of PLCs are usually influenced by the composition and components of the team members in PLCs. Consequently, Harris and Jones (2010) suggest that PLC is a model of cooperation. To make PLC plays the most effective role, it is necessary to let it have the potential for continuous innovation and development. Therefore, PLC enables schools to collect and listen to students in a meaningful and positive way. This may change the interaction mode between teachers and students and promote the positive development of teacher-student relationships. In addition, Stoll et al. (2006) make a compliment that a key function of PLC is to improve student's learning outcomes and interests. Another function is to improve the efficiency of teachers as PLC members. Because an effective PLC organization could lead educators in a variety of professions to take the initiative to learn and improve. Furthermore, Stoll et al. (2006) indicate that the development of PLCs in a cooperative way will have a beneficial impact on both teachers and students. For example, PLC may enhance the enthusiasm of teachers and believe that they have abilities to improve students' confidence in learning. For students, PLC could enhance students' learning initiative and improve learning motivation.

4. Application of the PLCs to China

4.1 Introduction

Professional learning communities are considered as infrastructure for teachers' professional skills development and students' learning results improvement (Chen, 2020). However, Qiao et al. (2017) find that most current research on PLC is under the Western mainstream background. Therefore, how PLCs develop and practice remains to be further discussed in Asia, which has special culture and history. In addition, Chen (2020) suggests that it is very common for teachers to promote their professional development through cooperation in China. Because the principle of PLCs has been distributed in the form of teaching research groups (Jiaoyanzu, TRGs) in the collective work of Chinese teachers (Yin and Zheng, 2018). Although the term "PLC" is not used in China, the researchers feel that TRGs have many of the same characteristics as PLCs (Huffman et al., 2015; Zhang and Pang, 2016; Zheng et al., 2018). Moreover, Zhang and Pang (2016) review that these characteristics include common goals, students' sense of responsibility for learning, and cooperation among teachers.

PLC has different interpretations and practices in different educational systems (Chen, 2020). For instance, TRG is regarded as the most representative form of PLC in mainland China because it is set up in schools and constitutes an important part of the Chinese educational system (Qiao et al., 2017). In the same way, Chen (2020) agrees with Qiao et al. (2017). He also believes that TRG, as a form of PLC in China, relates to a strong management system and becomes a part of

the Chinese educational system. About the operation of TRGs, Zhang and Pang (2015) consider that in Chinese schools, instructors who teach the same topic usually create a TRG, which strives to increase curricular efficiency through collaboration among teachers. Finally, Qiao et al. (2017) conclude that the PLCs of the educational system in mainland China could be divided into three main professional groups of teachers. They are teaching research groups (TRGs), informal learning groups and online learning groups respectively (Qiao et al., 2017). Therefore, teaching research groups (TRGs) are considered the most representative form of PLC in mainland China.

4.2 Research on PLCs (China)

PLCs in China have mainly experienced three development stages (Chen, 2020). When the People's Republic of China was founded, Zhang et al. (2016) reported that under the guidance of the Ministry of Education, Chinese schools established some training organizations in order to improve the quality of education. These training organizations were the basic forms of TRGs. From then on, TRG was established as a specialized organization, so the national school education research activities began to be formally established (Hu and Liu, 2012). Moreover, Zhang and Yuan (2020) added that these groups were not formed spontaneously but established through top-down methods under the guidance of the Ministry of Education. After the founding of The People's Republic of China, teachers' professional development had become a problem to be solved in national education due to the low emphasis on education (Chen, 2020). Therefore, it was very important to improve the professional skills of teachers effectively. This was the first stage of PLCs' development. After the Cultural Revolution, PLCs came to the second stage of development and schools were required to re-establish TRGs (Wang et al., 2017). The purpose was to improve the quality of school teaching and provide professional knowledge and training for teachers' development (Chen, 2020). Furthermore, under the background of educational reform, teachers needed to carry out teaching reform in the 21st century. This was the third stage of PLC development. At this stage, Zhang and Sun (2018) found that the teaching and research group provided a platform for schools to promote teachers' cooperation and improve teaching efficiency. Therefore, during the process of PLCs' development, TRGs reflected the characteristics of administrative management gradually. For example, after undergoing institutionalized changes in the 1980s, TRGs were created with the goals of not just professional development for teachers, but also school administration and teaching management (Chen, 2020).

The implementation of TRGs in China is influenced by Chinese traditional culture. For example, Chen (2020) explains that traditional Chinese culture emphasizes collectivism, collaboration, and interpersonal relationships. The collectivist culture of Chinese society is conducive to cooperation among teachers (Zhang and Yuan, 2020). More specifically, the social harmony of TRGs is one of the characteristics of PLCs in China (Qiao et al., 2017). Social harmony originated in Confucianism. Therefore, the goal of TRGs is to help teachers maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships and promote professional teaching skills. In the same way, Yin and Zheng (2018) also suggest that the implementation of PLCs is greatly influenced by Chinese traditional culture. For instance, Chinese culture is usually characterized by a high degree of collectivism and strong Confucian culture. These cultures have been proven to have an impact on teachers' professional development and leadership management in Chinese schools (Zhang and Yuan, 2020). However, Zhang and Pang (2015) argue that excessive collectivist culture will have a negative impact on PLCs. For example, excessive emphasis on harmoniousness will lead to few teachers putting forward innovative ideas, thus hindering the development of PLC. In addition to being influenced by collectivism, Chen (2020) also puts forward another characteristic of PLCs in China is respect for authority. It is also influenced by traditional Confucian culture.

In recent years, there has been discussion about the purpose of PLCs in Chinese schools mainly being administrative management or teachers' professional development. Yin and Zheng (2018) believe that PLCs have paid more attention to administrative management in recent years. They also suggest that although principals and school leaders are not participants in PLCs, principals and leaders are key factors affecting the structure of PLCs and schools (Yin and Zheng, 2018). Although most researchers acknowledge that principal plays an important role in improving the effectiveness of PLCs, few studies have investigated the relationship between principals' positions and the effectiveness of PLCs in China (Clarke, 2021). In

addition, Yin and Zheng (2018) discover that the principal's leadership has a great impact on the development of PLCs in Chinese schools. Because the abilities of principals are improving or hindering the important roles of PLCs' development in China. More concretely, Zhang et al. (2016) explore that leader's ineffective leadership is one of the difficulties in the development of PLCs. For example, teachers' superficial cooperation and ineffective leadership have appeared under the school's management (Zhang et al.,2016). Because school leaders may lack systematic planning, they just gather teachers together without professional support and guidance. However, Liu et al. (2016) argue that distributed leadership in PLCs has a positive impact on the professional development of teachers. Nevertheless, excessive administrative management by school leaders will hinder the development of PLCs, which means that leaders and educational administrators could reduce the effectiveness of PLCs to some extent by evaluating and monitoring teachers' cooperation (Zhang et al.,2016). Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2016) report that although TRGs are important forms of PLCs, TRGs also need to overcome some disadvantages to become more effective PLCs. For example, some educational leaders are reluctant to delegate leadership and over monitor teachers' performance which makes teachers lack initiative and enthusiasm in the process of teaching (Yin and Zheng, 2018). More importantly, Wang et al. (2017) consider that in some rural schools, leaders usually play dominant roles in PLCs, while teachers are usually passive and almost have no autonomy in PLCs. In comparison, Zhang and Yuan (2020) argue that most school leaders encourage teachers in PLCs to respond to educational curriculum reform actively. This could reduce the pressure on teachers and help teachers to take the initiative to implement the teaching process (Zhang and Yuan, 2020). Finally, Zhang and Sun (2018) conclude that school leaders begin to distribute and delegate power gradually. They make teachers participate in PLCs autonomously and enhance their enthusiasm.

However, some researchers believe that teachers' professional development is the main purpose of PLCs in China. Yin and Zheng (2018) put forward those principals and leaders are influential factors rather than components of PLC in China. Moreover, a PLC may include teachers, not all school staff (Yin and Zheng, 2018). Therefore, PLC pays more attention to the professional development of teachers. Additionally, Hu (2013) illustrates that improving the teaching quality and the professional development level of teachers through regular teaching and research activities is not only the requirement of the school and the superior department but also the goal and value of the teaching and research groups. Even though China adopts the top-down management method, Qian and Allan (2020) argue that professional knowledge is the core of the main purpose of PLCs. However, Zhang et al. (2016) find that under the influence of traditional Chinese culture of harmony and conflict avoidance, teachers' cooperation in Chinese PLCs is only superficial. Therefore, teachers need to cultivate trust to achieve meaningful cooperation and communication. Furthermore, school leaders encourage teachers with different viewpoints to help teachers improve their professional knowledge and encourage them to participate in PLCs actively (Zheng et al., 2018). For instance, Zhang and Yuan (2020) demonstrate that the improvement of professional quality includes the improvement of teaching effectiveness and the enhancement of students' sense of responsibility. More importantly, PLCs began to arrange professional activities regularly to improve the professional ability of teachers, such as group lesson preparation, peer observation, after-class discussion and so on (Yuan and Burns, 2016). Therefore, Hu (2013) reviews that the values of teaching and research activities are improving teaching quality and promoting teachers' professional development.

4.3 Critiques of PLCs (China)

Zhang et al. (2016) consider that under the influence of traditional culture, Chinese PLCs attach importance to cooperation. It requires the active participation of teachers and timely communication with students. However, Chen (2020) argues that collaboration in TRGs among teachers is still passive and superficial. For example, some Chinese schools evaluate and reward teachers according to students' test scores (Wang et al., 2017). This kind of evaluation could have an adverse effect on the development of TRGs because it encourages individualism rather than cooperation (Wang et al., 2017). Therefore, Sargent (2015) concludes that increasing opportunities for interaction among teachers is the key to mutual learning and cooperation among teachers. As a result, the gap between the realistic TRGs and the ideal PLCs needs to be narrowed. Furthermore, the current development status of PLCs in China is attaching importance to both administrative management and teachers' professional development. Although too much administrative management will affect the

enthusiasm of teachers, appropriate management is more conducive to the professional development of teachers. As a result, both are the essential purposes in the development of PLCs in China.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper compares the similarities and differences between PLCs in Western countries and Asian countries. Then it focuses on the analysis of the characteristics of PLCs in Chinese schools under the influence of Chinese traditional culture. It also makes a discussion and conclusion on whether the purpose of PLCs in China is administrative management or teachers' professional development.

Firstly, there is no unified definition of professional learning communities (PLCs). Because PLCs show the specific definition is different in different countries and cultural backgrounds. After comparing Western countries and Asian countries, it could be found that the definition of PLC mainly has three aspects. They are professional organizations for teachers and students to progress together, the transition from teachers' active teaching to students' active learning and the progress of the school respectively. Therefore, the definitions of PLCs in both Western and Asian countries mainly focus on these three aspects. Secondly, the PLCs in Western countries mainly show the characteristics of focusing on teachers' active cooperation, students' active learning and students' learning results. However, PLCs have different characteristics in some Asian countries. Because PLCs originated from Western countries. Asian countries will be influenced by their own traditional culture when introducing PLCs into their own countries. For example, PLCs in Asian countries like Singapore have a top-down model. This is due to the influence of the traditional culture of centralization. Under this characteristic, the position and function of school leaders in PLCs are higher. This may reduce the motivation of teachers to cooperate, but it will also give teachers positive guidance and suggestions. Generally speaking, PLCs of Asian countries combine with their own cultural background and reflect a unique PLCs mode. Therefore, no matter whether in Western countries or Asian countries, PLC plays an important role in different countries. Thirdly, this paper analyses the development process and characteristics of PLCs in China. Teaching Research Groups (TRGs), the representative form of PLCs is introduced to help readers understand the development of PLCs in China. PLCs in China have two main characteristics, one is administrative management, and the other is teachers' professional development. Some researchers believe that PLCs are more administrative. Influenced by Chinese traditional culture respecting authority, school leaders play leading roles in PLCs. It could manage the work of PLCs members effectively. However, other researchers argue that the main characteristic of PLCs is to promote the professional development of teachers. Because the teacher's professional knowledge is the core of PLCs' sustainable development. Finally, a conclusion could be drawn that PLCs in China has gradually developed from focusing on administrative management to focusing on the professional development of teachers. This is a dynamic process. Because both play key roles in PLCs.

This paper also has many limitations. For example, the research area is relatively narrow. For example, PLCs' characteristics could be compared by analysing more Western countries and Asian countries. Overall, this article is conducive to readers' understanding of PLCs in the world, especially the characteristics of PLCs in China.

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