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Teacher Professional Learning Community (TPLCs) on Social Studies Toward 21 st Century Learning: A Case Study of Primary Schools in Sukhothai Province, Thailand

This research was a qualitative study aimed to improve the teachers' teaching on social studies toward the 21st century learning of schools in Sukhothai Province, Thailand where methods of learning management were accordingly employed along with the learning in the 21st century. The data were collected from 2 schools with two administrators, twelve teachers, and one hundred students. The data collections were in-depth interview, observation, document study and focus group. The data was analyzed by content analysis.

The steps of TPLCs learning were including three steps 1) plan 2) do and observe and 3) reflect. The findings showed that TPLC's learning supports teachers in improving their practice through learning new curriculum and instructional strategies and the methods for interacting meaningfully with each child.

1. Introduction

Educational development in Thailand has long journey. Learning reform in 21st century is the core of educational reform that aspires to change the learning culture of Thai people in the entire nation to better prepare children for the higher educational demands of life and work in the 21st century. Besides, it also intends to improve the quality of Thai people by leading them for self-directed learning. Still, there is a simple overarching metaphor that has helped teachers appreciate the revolution of learning that there are starting to share experiences among teachers to develop their tasks. The work that teachers and student are doing in the suburban public schools that they consider to be the best in the nation is supposed to be the gold standard for all of the nation's children. Thailand has embarked on an ambitious series of reforms which increase complexity of educational reform. So, the teacher professional learning communities (TPLCs) become a powerful tool for that phenomenon and spreading in the international realm as a new model of professional development. Schools and teachers have been given the support and skills of children's need to implement this new approach toward 21st century learning. According to Chanbanchong (2010) pointed out the important of the teacher college, which is

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the largest teacher provider, cannot attract competent professor/ lecturers working of their career. This is the main obstacle to produce qualified teachers in the future. In addition, in term of productivity improvement of teacher career market incentive, by comparing to other occupations, teachers get poorer paid, lack of support in academic training reflecting their teaching skills and dedication to students to be undervalued in the appraisal system.

The result of the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows sharp falls in mathematics, sciences and reading scores for students in Thailand (OECD, 2016). Thai students are underperforming their peers in several Asian countries as their scores were below the international average in all three subjects. The surveyed of the knowledge and skills in mathematics, sciences and reading of more than half a million 15- year- olds across 70 countries worldwide. Thai children scored 415 points in maths, far lower than the international average of 490 points. In sciences, Thai students scored 421 points, much worse than the international average of 493. And in reading, Thais scored 409 points, well below the OECD average of 493 points.

Nowadays, primary teachers teach almost every subject is a common issue, in some subjects, students are not being taught at the required level that is no emphasizing on implementation and specialization. The practice of shared vision involves the skills and experiences in learning management among teachers are not miscellaneous enough. TPLC will be included teachers of varies schools in who are collaboratively and continually working together for the betterment of social studies subject of primary students. Furthermore, the most TPLC could be engaged teams of teachers to focus on the needs of their students (Senge, 2010) . They learn and problem solve together in order to ensure all students achieve success.

2. Objective of the study

The research aimed to improve the teachers' teaching on social studies toward the 21st century learning of primary schools in Sukhothai Province, Thailand.

3. Literature review

3.1 21st Century competencies

Globalization, changing demographics and technological advancements are some of the key driving forces of the future. Thai students will have to be prepared to face these challenges and seize the opportunities brought about by these forces. Social studies should make innovations

related to changes of 21st century skills and learning paradigm, which is characterized by the principles of disclosure of information, computing, automation, and communication. Technology integration into social studies learning is one of the learning innovations in the global-digital era, and powerfully supports of the national curriculum. Therefore, learning management to develop Thailand's education in this century must aim to move towards collaborative learning between teacher and students by focusing on "learning process rather than knowledge" and "answer finding process rather than answers." In order to achieve the goal for 21st Skills which include the three important skills, as follows:

(1) Learning and Innovation Skills: These skills focus on the development of abilities in critical thinking, communication problem solving, cooperation building g, creative thinking, and innovation.

(2) Life and Career Skills: These skills focus on the development of the following qualities: flexibility and adjustment, life goal planning, determination, society understanding, cultural difference recognition, production potential, checks and balances acceptance, leadership, and responsibility.

(3) Information, Media, and Technology Skills: These skills focus on abilities in accessing various information and media appropriately, managing, linking, evaluating, and creating information as well as applying morals and laws in information technology.

Ministry of Education (MOE, 2008) of Thailand pointed out the learning area of social studies, religion and culture enables learners to acquire knowledge and understand the lives of human beings as both individuals and as coexisting members of a society. The area addresses self-adjustment in accord with exigencies of environmental situations and management of limited resources. Learners acquire understanding of development and change in accord with exigencies of various periods, times and factors, leading to understanding of oneself and others. Learners also acquire patience, forbearance and acceptance of differences. They are endowed with morality and the ability to adjust knowledge gained for application in leading their lives as good citizens of the country and desirable members of the world community.

The performance outcomes on social studies of grade 6 graduates as follows;

(1) Have knowledge about their own provinces, regions and the country regarding history, physical characteristics, societies, traditions and culture as well as politics, administration and economic situations, with emphasis on Thai nationhood

(2) Have knowledge and understanding about religion, morality and ethics; observe principles and teachings of their religions, as well as exhibit greater participation in religious rites and ceremonies

(3) Conduct themselves in accord with the status, roles, rights and duties as good citizens of the local areas, provinces, regions and the country, as well as exhibit greater participation in activities in line with customs, traditions and culture of their own areas

(4) Can compare data and information about Thailand's various provinces and regions with those of neighbouring countries; have developed sociological concepts regarding religion, morality, ethics, civics, economics, history and geography, with a view to widening their experiences for understanding of the Eastern and Western worlds regarding religion, morality, ethics, values, beliefs, customs, traditions, culture and way of life; have developed concepts of organization of social order and social change from past to the present.

4. Teacher Professional Learning Community (TPLC)

Teacher Professional learning community (PLC) is a current 'buzz' term in business and educational contexts, seemingly referring to anything from decision making committees to regular meeting groups or collegial learning teams. In general, defined, a professional learning community (PLC) is "a team sharing and critically interrogating their practice in and ongoing, reflective, collaborative inclusive, learning-oriented growth-promoting ways" (Stollet al. 2006, p. 223). The most successful corporation of the future will be a learning organization" (Senge, p. 1990). Organizations that build in continuous learning in jobs will dominate the 21st century" (Drucker, 1992, p. 108).

In both the private corporate world and the public education sector, attention in the 1980s began to focus on the influence of work settings on workers. Rosenholtz (1989) brought teacher workplace factors into the discussion of teaching quality, maintaining that teachers who felt supported in their own ongoing learning and classroom practice were more committed and effective than those who did not. Support by means of teacher networks, cooperation among colleagues, and expanded professional roles increased teacher efficacy for meeting students' needs. Further, Rosenholtz found that teachers with a strong sense of their own efficacy were more likely to adopt new classroom behaviors and that a strong sense of efficacy encouraged

teachers to stay in the profession. Fullan (1991) focused on the teacher workplace and recommended a "redesign [of] the workplace so that innovation and improvement are built into the daily activities of teachers".

The ultimate goal of a professional learning community (PLC) can be summed up as following (Bolam et al., 2005):

− Represents a collective effort to enhance student learning

− Promotes and sustains the learning of all professionals in the school

− Builds knowledge through inquiry

− Analyses and uses data for reflection and improvement : Teachers are afforded the time and opportunities to meet and to collectively focus on student data. They are uniquely situated to turn a light on the instructional needs of the subgroups in the student population.

− Collaborative observation: Collaborative observation is a strategy in which colleagues provide support and feedback to one another about the effective use of new instructional practices. It includes such activities as coaching, peer observation, mentoring, and inter classroom visitation programs. Many activities that involve some form of collaborative observation are included in the chapters in this book. When collaborative observation becomes an integral aspect of a school's culture, the focus is continuously on the classroom practices that foster student and teacher learning.

− Cross-grade planning teams: In collaboration with a school, cross-grade planning teams meet monthly for cross-grade conversations that advance their understanding of the content of and expectations for the major areas of the curriculum. The focus of this ongoing project is vertical and horizontal curriculum planning in English language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science. Each staff member in the school sits on one of these teams.

− *School* wide leadership team: The state-mandated school leadership team develops school-based educational policies and ensures that resources are aligned to implement those policies.

− Grade-level planning teams: Twice a month the literacy and math coaches effectively work with teachers at the grade level meetings to ensure curricular alignment at each grade level. They plan to work and learn together to improve student learning. How Is Student Achievement Affected by the Learning Community Model? Teachers in learning community schools engage in collaborative activities directed toward helping

them to improve their instructional practices. Their students are likely to be the beneficiaries as the teachers share ideas, learn innovative and better ways of teaching, and try the newly learned approaches in the classroom.

− Higher education partnership: Another university partnership addresses the improvement of literacy instruction by embedding ongoing professional development activities throughout the school day. Through these structured, ongoing activities and partnerships, teachers build community and expand their knowledge of curriculum and instruction. They are better prepared to assume collective responsibility for the learning of all students in the school community.

5. Metodology

The methodological approach used in the study sought to assist in the analysis of the TPLC process in Sukhothai province. A qualitative study was conducted within a naturalistic, interpretive paradigm, guided by Donabedian's (1992) conceptual framework of the TPLC as a strategy for students grade 6 learning on Social Studies toward 21st Century Learning. The method was bounded within a case study of two schools in Sukhothai province. Participatory action research was used. The qualitative study was conducted in three steps as follows (1) the planning step (2) doing and observing step (3) and reflection step on social studies for students grad 6 of Primary Schools in Sukhothai province. Each of three steps involved the use of focus groups and observation of the TPLC; in total, twelve teachers, and one hundred students were involved. Finally, the author undertook semi‑structured interviews with two administrators in order to develop a TPLC.

In relation to data analysis, the author used the qualitative analysis technique of triangulation of sources (focus group, semi-structured interviews and observation) as there was no numeric translation of data beyond the calculation of percentage frequencies. The author focused on the meaning of the information collected in two ways a content analysis that was descriptive, and an interpretation of the responses that reflected levels of complexity. This qualitative analysis process involved coding the information into categories or levels looking for similarities and differences among the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

6. Results

The findings of the study were derived from content analysis and interpretation in order to answer the following research steps: (1) plan (2) do and observe and (3) reflect on social studies toward 21st Century learning for students grade 6 of primary schools in Sukhothai province.

6.1 Analysis of the process of TPLC

TPLC tend serve to two broad purposes: (1) improving the skills and knowledge of educators through collaborative study, expertise exchange, and professional dialogue, and (2) improving the educational aspirations, achievement, and attainment of students through stronger leadership and teaching. TPLC was a function as a form of action research—i. e., as a way to continually question, reevaluate, refine, and improve teaching strategies and knowledge. Meetings are goal‑driven exchanges facilitated by researchers who have been trained to lead TPLC.

Step 1: **Plan**

In this step discussing teacher work: participants collectively review lesson plans or assessments that had been used in a class, and then offered the critical feedback and recommendations for improvement. They had ensuring all students learn becomes a matter of delivering fair and equitable instruction from classroom to classroom.

All participants asked the question to themselves "What are teachers of thinking required to do? Teaching for the development of reasoning in students is the antithesis of teaching for the recall of factual content. The development of critical thinking, or higher-level reasoning, in students requires by definition that they be given an opportunity to exercise their own minds, to engage in critical appraisal, to risk opinions in a sympathetic atmosphere and then have the opinions challenged in a rational but respectful manner.

Colleagues defined the goal of social studies toward 21st Century Learning issues which related national curriculum; assessed current situation of knowledge for students' understanding about their own provinces, regions, country, and global regarding history, physical characteristics, societies, traditions and culture as well as politics, administration and economic situations; analyze possible causes and described the investigation and the data used to determine the needs of the social studies subject of students grade 6. The lesson plan of social studies subject for this study created such an atmosphere, the teacher needs to have participated

among community an intimate understanding of the range of reasoning and arguments displayed by his or her students. The lesson plan concerned mastery of a range of techniques such as leading questions, suspending judgment, setting challenges appropriate to particular children, and the ability of learning outcomes.

Step 2: Do and observe
Participants involved in PLC on social studies subject and permitted volunteer demonstrated the lesson plan. Team teaching described how challenging it was to change the way she/he saw the role of teaching: from that of expert who supplied the right answers to rather less of an expert who probed the students to come up with their learning outcomes. In this step, participants were resulting in improvements were an aspect of the professional learning community that couldn't be overlooked. In order to focus on students learning rather than teaching, students attainment of knowledge and skills must be consistently considered and reviewed among participants. The results of demonstrated the lesson plan, as follows:

"Although my teaching process were good, but I found it wasn't easy to let go of the control with community that involved in the topic of sufficiency economy. The speed at which the children asked the questions with farmers had me answering instinctively, and my other instinct is to ask questions which lead to the 'right' answer. It was only in hindsight (and using a tape recorder, a great help) that the author saw students missed opportunities to learn from framers, and saw that the assumptions how the farmers to produce the organic insecticides.

Students' Project: Green classroom to green community

This was an project that created from lesson plan at Srisamrong Wittaya school. The project that encouraged students to concern community effectively, by searching for reduce global warming by the sufficiency path: from green classroom to green community. A series of campaign and public relations activities had been implemented so that all school members were aware of the impact of global warming. The project included the following activities;

(1) Sustainable travel: Students were encouraged to ride a bicycle or to walk to school instead of riding a motorcycle.

(2) Energy saving: Students in primary education grades 1-3 run campaigns to promote electricity and energy saving.

(3) Garbage reduction: Students competed in finding solutions to reduce garbage, such as making books from recycled paper, bringing bottles of water to school instead of buying them every day, global warming reduction campaigns, and making organic fertilizer from leftover vegetables and fruits.

(4) Expanding the green area: Students in primary grades 4 and 6 plant trees in the school in order to expand the green area in community.

Step 3: Reflect

The TPLC as changes in the way the participants acts and thinks. When teacher change results in another change this is called a change sequence, e.g. if the teacher changes her/his opinion about a method of teaching and this leads to her/his utilizing this method more. If the changes in the change sequence proves to be lasting this is called a growth network. A lasting change is something the teacher does not only try short period and thereafter forgets, but experience that influences her/his teaching for a longer time that will be changed sequence, growth and growth network of schools.

In this step, teachers discussed the results of teaching and to elaborate new exercises, that is changes the external domain, the exercises. The teachers create new exercises on other issues of social studies during the subject meeting.

7. Conclusion

The Model of TPLC to ensure that students have opportunities for achievement learning and that steps of plan-do&observe-reflect support are in place. TPLC experiences that focus on the links between particular teaching activities and valued student outcomes are associated with positive impacts on those outcomes. The results of this research found that the teacher share and learn of instruction. Teachers were active reflective, collaborative, learning-oriented and growth-promoting approach towards 21st century of teaching and learning. That TPLC is found in a literature review that the learning community characteristics working in concert with one another fostered a change in the teaching culture of the schools under study (Vescio et al., 2006, pp. 17–18). It was concluded, of TPLC is improved because the learning communities increase collaboration, a focus on student learning from steps of plan-do&observe-reflect, teacher authority or empowerment, and continuous learning (see figure 1). As schools work toward developing learning communities, it important to focus on student learning keep in their mind that shared values and norms are the cornerstone on which the community rests and from which the other dimensions will take root (Kruse et al., 1995). At the same time, teachers can feel empowered to act on their shared beliefs only if the school and district leadership offer them the autonomy, the opportunity, and the time to meet that they need to decide about improving teaching and learning.
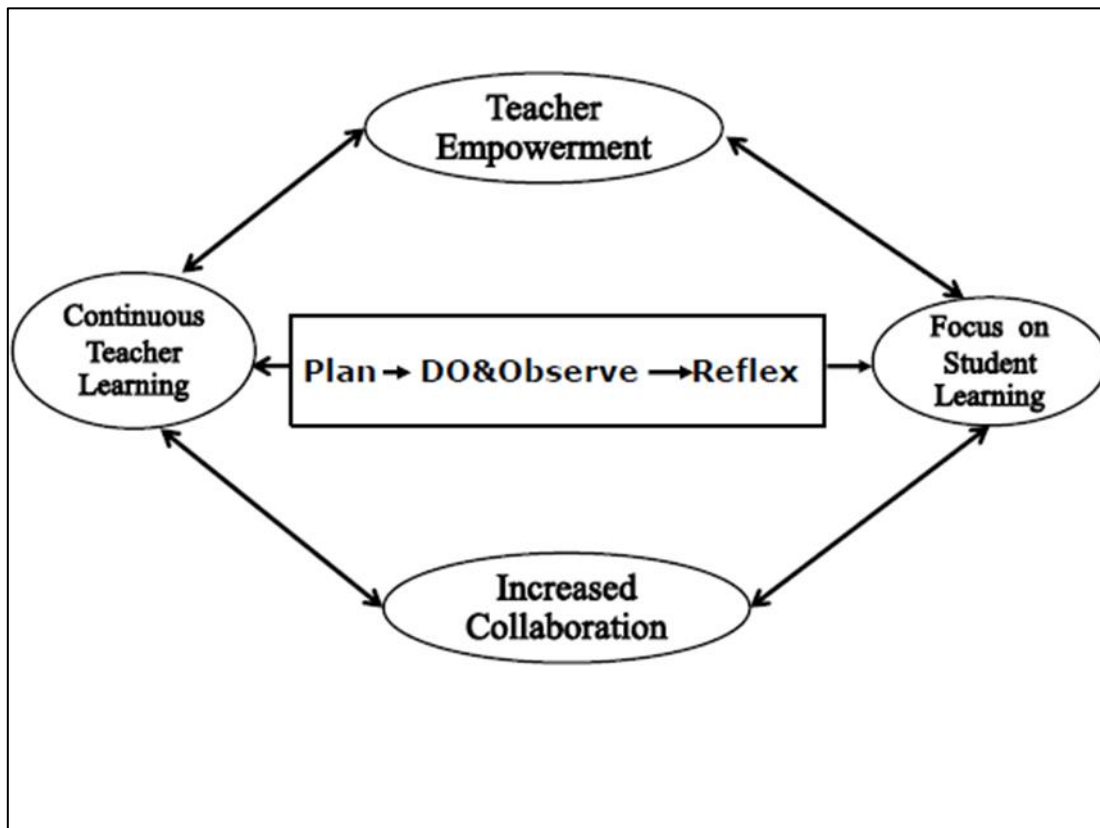
Source: Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2006).

8. Suggestions

8.1 Alignment at School level

As the TPLC continue to investigate of action research, delve into data, monitor progress, and make programs transparent, an alignment of beliefs and effective practices evolves. Alignment will be occurred when teachers from the same grade from different school collaborate to promote high levels of learning in each classroom. Networks can then form – based on common needs and focus – to encompass various TPLC groups and schools to further build capacity and alignment.

8.2 Alignment at individual level

It is important for staff to accept the responsibility of the success of all students, not only the students in their class. With acceptance of this responsibility, PLCs explore how curriculum expectations are achieved at the various grade levels and determine collectively how instruction needs to change to meet the specific needs of students throughout the grades.

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