

Review of: "Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for English Teachers as an Effective Alternative Framework for Professional Development"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Thank you for the study and for sharing your results! Below you find my comments that I hope will help improve the study. Overall, the study confirms previous research on PLCs. The study would benefit from updated references and specific questions to explore. Proofreading and revisions throughout the paper are needed to make the study relevant and focused methodologically, conceptually and contextually. Following the general academic structure of a paper, i.e., Introduction, Literature Review, Theory, Methods, Analysis, Results and Discussion would improve the study.

Abstract:

The abstract could be specified to help the reader understand the study's aim and provide contextual information as to what previous models on PLC exist and what this new model entails. Additionally, I wonder what the English Inspectorate is and how the authors define Professional Learning Community. Professional development can mean many different things, so narrowing the focus of the study already in the abstract would be necessary. Given the qualitative method and the number of participants, the results could be framed differently; I'm not convinced a phenomenological approach is appropriate for assessing how effective a model is. Instead, I would expect a qualitative analysis of human lived experiences of some specific aspect of the PLC.

Introduction:

The introduction is rather general and does not provide contextual information about the study and its rationale. If the study concerns English as a Foreign Language teachers, there may be studies specifically addressing professional development among these subject teachers. Professional development in this study needs to be clarified. The authors give two different examples that do not help to establish what they are after in this paper (collective lesson planning is a broad field in itself, and what does a broader relevance on teaching mean?): "This can be around a specific topic, for example, collective lesson planning instruction or have broader relevance on teaching Yang 2020)".

One of the last statements in the introduction should be problematized, "Rather than being transmitters of information, teachers need to be facilitators of learning" (Owen 2012, p58). Being a teacher is perhaps always a matter of transmitting (relevant) information and facilitating students' abilities to study and learn new things. Several scholars have criticized downplaying of the role of teaching in favor of learning (such as Gert Biesta and Michael Uljens). I suggest the authors

consider revising the abstract and introduction to establish central concepts, what previous research tells us about PLCs generally and specifically in an EFL context, and add current references (from the 2020s). Any abbreviations need to be explained, such as EFL.

The literature review

The literature review could be revised and shortened to provide a current mapping of research on models for PLC and general knowledge about professional development. Detailed information such as this sentence stands out:

"One participant quoted in Prenger's study of learning communities said that "[The PLC] highly stimulates out of the box thinking about what I can do differently by means of others' knowledge" (Prenger 2018, p8)."

The following sentence is unclear: "The inquiry revolves around issues that emerge from "authentic teaching settings" as opposed to formal coursework that is "content-based" (Buysse 2003, p267)."

Establishing a conceptual framework seems important since the authors are using Professional learning communities, professional development, and teacher study groups, and it is unclear what the difference is and how the different concepts contribute to the field. The literature review now paints a very positive picture of professional collaboration, but these are complicated processes and studies that address challenges with PLCs should also be included. If the paper aims to evaluate a PLC model, the authors should consider how previous studies have done that. Similar initiatives, such as action research and lesson and learning study, may also contribute to the study since PLCs do not seem to offer precise methods or models for teachers to consider.

The methods section

Phenomenology is a comprehensive approach, and the authors need to add relevant references and information about why and how they worked with phenomenology. Previous research has suggested different models and analytical procedures for phenomenology that may help the authors revise the analysis and results. The study seems to seek to explore the lived experiences (?) of 16 teachers when participating in a PLC. As stated before, I question if the approach is suitable for evaluating a model. Instead, I would expect the authors to address personal and qualitative experiences that mattered to the participants. If a model is to be evaluated, contextual information about how the PLCs were organized (schedules, aims, materials etc.) is essential. Ethical considerations and what ethical guidelines the researchers followed, such as informed consent and data protection, are not covered at any great length. Information about the participants, their backgrounds etc., is not included in the methods section; some of it is presented as part of the analysis, which is not helpful to the readers. Adding research questions would benefit the study.

I suggest the authors add a section for contextual information related to PLCs in Israel and studies done on the initiative in the methods section and move some of the sections from before here.

Another matter is the two different data collection methods, observations and interviews. How can observations be argued for from a phenomenological perspective if personal experiences are important? The description of and motivation for the data collection is weak, and no references are used. The few observations can be questioned since they cannot offer an

in-depth understanding of the interactions during the PLC, nor are the observation procedures accounted for (e.g., protocols, biases, researcher's influence). The individual (?) interviews are also superficially presented, no information about, e.g., site, recordings and transcription are included. The role of the researcher from a phenomenological perspective is not discussed, nor is it clear how the two authors collaborated in the study.

The authors should revise the methods sections concerning ontological, epistemological, methodological, and analytical clarity. The authors state that they did not have a hypothesis. Still, they want to evaluate a specific approach like PLC. Furthermore, the themes in the analysis seem to build on what previous research has established, making the analysis more deductive than inductive.

Discussion/Results

The results section presents the analysis and references previous research, which is untypical for inductive research and most qualitative approaches. Presenting the results from the analysis this way makes it harder to grasp the contributions of the paper as the analysis becomes long and the discussion less focused. It leads to the question of what this study brings to the field of PLC since they mainly confirm what we already know. Designing the study around unexplored topics (for example, the lead teacher or conflicts in PLCs) would have benefited the study from methodological, epistemological, and analytical perspectives.

Proof-checking is needed, and the structure and flow of the text could be better. Some paragraphs are long, and some include sentences that are not discussed or followed up. Some paragraphs include information that should not be there, for example: "Teacher study groups as a vehicle to strengthen EFL teachers' professional identity and voice. The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly, 7(4), 50-73. The model of professional learning communities was initiated in the 1990's in the United States. (DuFour 2004)."

Hope you can improve the article with these comments - good luck with the revisions!