

Unwelcome truths of the professional learning community policy in Thailand: Teacher's sensemaking

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The literature on educational policy implementation has shifted the paradigm from investigating how policy impacted upon schools to exploring how teachers interpret, adapt, or implement policy messages. Much research has been conducted in United States of America settings, so little is understood about how teachers interpret policy messages in other settings. This study extends this line of research to investigate how teachers in Thailand, situated in the Asian context with a collective and hierarchical culture, reconstructed an understanding of the policy, Professional Learning Community (PLC) and why they decided to implement the policy in their contexts. Drawing on sensemaking theory and teacher agency, the data revealed a complicated process of sensemaking through an interplay between prior worldviews and sociocultural context. Within the limitations of policy implementation in the context, teachers exercise their agency to selectively implement some policy messages based on their students. Implications for policy makers are provided.

Introduction

Research on policy implementation in education has been traditionally conducted to understand how policy impacts schools and practitioners (Coburn, 2001). This line of research is inherently problematic in two ways. First, it treats policy as a static and unquestionable document that practitioners must conform with strictly. Second, it views teachers as passive receivers of a policy (Bunten, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 1990; Newcomer & Collier, 2015). In this view, the policy is mandated and passed down to teachers (Bunten, 2014). However, recent research has provided empirical evidence to argue that teachers are not passive policy followers; rather they are active agents, who interpret, negotiate, adapt, or implement policy messages in their contexts (Bunten, 2014; Coburn, 2001; Newcomer & Collier, 2015). In other words, as teachers make sense of policy messages, they are not policy followers, but they are *de facto* *policy makers* in their contexts (Newcomer & Collier, 2015). This research area is important to the field of policy analysis and implementation because it illuminates the complexity of policy interpretation at the bottom-up level and it provides space for teachers to express their opinions toward the policy implementation (Bunten, 2014; Louis, Febey & Schroeder, 2005).

Since the research community has shifted the paradigm to examine how teachers interpret policy messages, many researchers have responded to the shift and the body of knowledge in this line of research has burgeoned (e.g., Bunten, 2014; Chase, 2016; Coburn, 2001; Louis et al., 2005; Newcomer & Collier, 2015; Reinhorn, Johnson, & Simon, 2017). This paradigm shift is important in the field of policy analysis and implementation because it adds insight to policy effects from the bottom-up level (Louis et al., 2005). It is now understood that teachers make sense of policy messages individually, collectively, or

selectively by filtering policy messages through their worldviews and professional beliefs, and they also negotiate which messages to implement, based on school contexts and culture (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Bunten, 2014; Chase, 2016; Coburn, 2001; Louis et al., 2005; Newcomer & Collier, 2015; Reinhorn et al., 2017). The current understanding points out the importance of social context as a mediating factor, influencing how teachers interpret and implement policy messages in their classrooms (Chase, 2016). A closer look into prior research reveals that previous research has been conducted mainly in the United States context (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Bunten, 2014; Chase, 2016; Coburn, 2001; Louis et al., 2005; Newcomer & Collier, 2015; Reinhorn et al., 2017). More research should be conducted in other settings, such as in Asian contexts, which has a collective and hierarchical culture, different from the United States. An exploration of how teachers interpret policy messages in the Asian context will contribute an understanding of the relationship between policy and classroom practice in an under-researched context.

Thailand provides a fertile context to study how teachers make sense of policy messages in an under-researched context for two reasons. First, Thailand is situated in the Asian context and has a collective and hierarchical culture, which is a unique context that prior studies have not covered. Second, Thailand has recently implemented a new policy, *Professional Learning Community* (PLC), in 2016 as a required professional development initiative. The PLC policy in Thailand is still in the initial stage of implementation, and it has already created a chaos of misconceptions throughout the country; many schools were uncertain about how to implement the policy in their contexts. These two reasons make Thailand an important case for further exploration. This study attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' sensemaking meanings about the PLC policy messages?
2. In what ways do teachers decide to implement PLC in their classrooms?

Multifaceted dimensions of Professional Learning Community

PLC is now becoming a global practice in diverse educational contexts (Pang & Wang, 2016) including the United States (Olivier & Huffman, 2016), Hong Kong (Pang, Wang, & Leung, 2016), Taiwan (Chen & Wang, 2015), and Singapore (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). In these diverse contexts, PLC has been conceptualised differently in terms of *the definition of community* and *the characteristics of PLC*, making it difficult to reach a consensus of what PLC entails (Hairon, Goh, Chua & Wang, 2017). In order to decipher the construct of PLC, its elements should be discussed. Hairon et al. (2017) postulated that PLC is a multidimensional construct, consisting of three interdependent dimensions, *professional*, *learning*, and *community*. Taken these dimensions together, PLC is regarded as a group of teachers/educators who decide to collaborate based on a common concern in order to solve problems through interrogating, sharing, and reflecting practices, resulting in the development of learning expertise (Chen & Wang, 2015; Hairon et al., 2017). Based on this definition, the heart of PLC is a common concern that draws teachers to form a community, learn from each other to solve the concern, and engage in extensive collaboration and reflection. Existing literature shows that there are misconceptions of

PLC, relegating the concept to a mere group of teachers working together (Hairon et al., 2017). From this view, the heart of PLC was displaced to community.

Prior research has complicated the scope of community in PLC; some conceptualised community within the school-level domain, while others operationalised PLC within the group-level domain (Hairon et al., 2017). Differences in conceptualisation have resulted in differences in the characteristics of PLC that are emphasised. For example, Oliver and Huffman (2016) defined PLC in the context of creating a whole school culture to collaborate for the common goal of student learning. Based on this view, the characteristics of PLC were practised in a broader sociocultural context: shared leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning, shared personal practice, and shared conditions (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). These characteristics emphasise the role of school leaders to create a collaborative culture within the school context. It is the holistic environment that creates collaboration among staff members to have a common goal for student learning. However, Tam (2015) operationalised PLC within the group-level domain, referring to a community of teachers. From this perspective, the characteristics of PLC include reflective dialogue, collaborative activity, shared sense of purpose, and a collective focus on student learning (Tam, 2015).

PLC has been implemented with diverse intentions. In some countries (e.g., the United States and Hong Kong), PLC takes place as a result of executing educational reform; teachers feel the need to work together to make sense of the reform policies (Olivier & Huffman, 2016; Pang & Wang, 2016). In this sense, professional learning community occurs naturally as a form of collaboration to respond to educational reform. In other countries (e.g., Scotland, Taiwan and Singapore), PLC is a mandated practice for national teacher professional development (Chen & Wang, 2015; Philpott & Oates, 2017; Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). In this sense, PLC is a policy to conform. Since the 1990s, PLC has received increasing attention in English-speaking countries, especially in the United States, as a compelling strategy to improve teacher quality and later improve student outcomes (Pang & Wang, 2016). Limited research has been conducted to understand other contexts, such as in Asian collective and hierarchical cultures. This study uses Thailand as a case of an Asian country with a collective and hierarchical culture to understand how teachers make sense of the PLC policy messages.

Sketching the PLC policy messages in Thailand

PLC is now becoming a fashionable word in Thailand, echoing throughout the landscape of education. The origin of PLC may be traced back to a research report, conducted by the Thailand Development Research Institute, a non-profit organisation that provides empirical analyses to help formulate policies for long-term economic and social development. The research was conducted with attempts to create a holistic strategic plan for educational reform in the era of accountability (Tangkitvanit et al., 2013). The report presented an analysis of the current situation of teacher professional development problems and practices in Thailand. Tangkitvanit et al. (2013) pointed out that prior professional development did not reflect the needs of local teachers. Most teacher

professional development activities were lectured-based, conducted by external experts who did not understand local needs, and lacked follow-up activities to promote implementation. In addition, previous teacher professional development was not tied to an evaluation of career path advancement. Drawing on these findings, Tangkitvanit et al. (2013) suggested PLC as a way to solve these problems. PLC has emerged from the literature review as an effective approach to professional development in other countries. PLC was suggested because of its promising evidence to increase teacher learning and improve student outcomes. The report was submitted to the Office of the Basic Education Commission (<https://www.obec.go.th>). The PLC policy was mandated in 2016 as a result of this report.

The journey of the PLC policy is ambiguous; little is known about how the policy has travelled throughout the country. Dissemination of PLC commenced in about March 2016, when the Ministry of Education organised a seminar to present PLC as a new model of teacher professional development to the directors of educational service areas, who would later disseminate the policy to the schools under their jurisdiction. It was the first time that the country has heard the term PLC. A year later, the concept had received much attention throughout the country. During 1-6 April 2017 the Teachers and Basic Education Development Bureau organised three seminars to disseminate the PLC initiative to three batches of supervisors, from many parts of the country. After the seminars, the supervisors were expected to disseminate the concept of PLC and supervise teachers to implement PLC. The speakers in the seminars consisted of experienced directors who had already implemented PLC at their schools. The seminars were recorded and the materials for the seminars were posted on the Bureau's website and related websites, to be used as references for teachers.

To examine how teachers make sense of policy messages, it is important to problematise the degree to which the messages are accurately disseminated (Louis et al., 2005). Based on the recorded videos and materials from the seminars, it is evident that the messages of the PLC policy are problematic as the policy conveys *multiple, oversimplified, and confusing* messages. The speakers in the seminars communicated the notion of PLC from different perspectives, and they failed to address the multiple levels of PLC. For example, a speaker who was a director presented PLC as a method to solve student's problems by encouraging teachers to work in groups, to discuss a common problem, to find a solution to solve the problem, to implement the shared solution, and to reflect upon the effectiveness of the solution. However, another speaker, a supervisor, described PLC as an instructional approach that encourages collaboration among teachers to share their problem-solving methods for student's learning. From these perspectives, it is evident that PLC was conceptualised differently, but no explicit attempts were made to distinguish the multifaceted aspects of PLC. Thus, PLC might be taken simply as a group of teachers working together, which is not an authentic concept of PLC as teacher professional development. Apart from conveying the PLC inappropriately at the definition level, the speakers did not provide specific guidelines on how to conduct PLC from a teacher's perspective. What kind of problems to focus upon? How do teachers select a group? How do they record their PLC logbooks? How to count the number of hours? These practical questions were not presented clearly in the seminars.

Concurrently with dissemination of the PLC concept, the Teacher's Council of Thailand stipulated five characteristics of the PLC model as follows: 1) shared values and norms; 2) collective focus on student learning; 3) collaboration; 4) expert advice and study visits; and 5) reflective dialogue (Vehachart, 2018). The characteristics were used as guidelines for conducting PLC in schools. Based on these characteristics, again it is not known whether PLC is conceptualised from the school-level domain, the group-level domain, or both. The PLC policy in Thailand is a good example of a 'top-down' policy implementation, which the Ministry of Education mandated schools to follow.

Bridging sensemaking theory and teacher agency

To capture the interpretation of policy messages, this study is guided by two interrelated theoretical frameworks: *sensemaking theory* and *teacher agency*. According to Coburn (2001), sensemaking theory explains how teachers collectively reconstruct an understanding of policy messages, rooted in a social context. The reconstruction of meaning assumes that the policy messages are inherently multiple and problematic. The collective endeavour is conducted as teachers interact with each other formally or informally, discuss policy meanings, and negotiate which messages to implement in the classroom (Coburn, 2001; Louis et al., 2005). Based on this view, sensemaking theory acknowledges the active roles of teachers in reconstructing an interpretative meaning of policy messages, deciding which messages to conform with. Meaning is not given; it is reconstructed through problematising policy messages and attempting to understand the messages collaboratively (Coburn, 2001).

Sensemaking theory addresses the individual capacity to interpret policy messages by filtering new messages through a pre-existing cognitive framework (Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). From this perspective, teachers come to make sense of the policy with multifaceted cognitive resources, including but not limited to pre-existing cognition, worldview, beliefs, and previous practices (Coburn, 2001; Spillane et al., 2002). It should be noted that sensemaking is not simply equivalent to information coding, which assumes a passive role for individuals (Spillane et al., 2002). Rather, sensemaking of policy messages is an active process of noticing messages, processing meaning, and organising new knowledge. The results of this process tend to be fragmented; teachers select which messages are legitimate and appropriate to be implemented in their contexts (Coburn, 2001).

Additionally, sensemaking theory also emphasises the role of sociocultural context in shaping sensemaking (Chase, 2016; Coburn, 2001; Reinhorn et al., 2017; Spillane et al., 2002). Aspects of sociocultural context, such as school culture, classroom, or routines, influence how teachers make sense of the policy messages, since these can be supportive or hindering factors for teachers' implementation of certain policy messages (Chase, 2016; Coburn, 2001). The sociocultural context extends to a broader macro-level context including political narratives, social structure, or national norms (Chase, 2016; Helms Mills, Thurlow & Mills, 2010). This extension points to the importance of investigating how teachers in various contexts interpret policy messages. The review of the literature

suggests that most research has been conducted in the United States context, so less is understood about other settings, especially in Asian contexts, which have collective and hierarchical cultures. This study extends this line of research to focus on an Asian country, Thailand, which has recently mandated and enforced a new policy initiative.

Criticism of sensemaking theory has argued that the theory takes for granted the power issue during the sensemaking process, so little is known about why teachers selectively implement certain messages in their contexts. Previous research (Bunten, 2014; Newcomer & Collier, 2015) has pointed out that teachers are policy negotiators; they often find a place to act on behalf of their students, regardless of a conflicting policy implementation context. From this perspective, teachers exercise their agency (Bunten, 2014). Teacher agency as a theoretical perspective is used to explain the active roles of teachers in negotiating conflicting demands, making certain choices, and acting to bring change within their contexts (Toom, Pyhältö & Rust, 2015). From the sociocultural model, teacher agency is socially constructed, and influenced by sociocultural resources (Newcomer & Collier, 2015; Philpott & Oates, 2016). It should be noted that when teachers exercise their agency, it does not mean that the result will always lead to a policy counterpart. Rather, they conform selectively with policy messages and find a place to act on behalf of their students (Bunten, 2014; Newcomer & Collier, 2015).

Related research

Most research on teachers' sensemaking of policy messages has been conducted in the United States (Chase, 2016; Coburn, 2001; Louis et al., 2005; Reinhorn et al., 2017). In general, the findings gave consistent results that teachers in the United States context are active agents who interpret, adapt, and implement policy messages into the classrooms, through filtering new information through worldviews, informal interactions with colleagues, and considering sociocultural boundaries. Also, whether they are aware of their power or not, teachers do have a control over policy implementation (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Bunten, 2014; Chase, 2016; Coburn, 2001; Louis et al., 2005; Newcomer & Collier, 2015; Reinhorn et al., 2017).

The sensemaking process takes places within an individual, cognitive, social and collective framework. For example, Coburn (2001) investigated how teachers make sense of reading policy in the U.S. context, and termed it collective sensemaking. Coburn (2001) found that teachers co-constructed understandings of multiple policy messages by filtering policy meanings through their prior worldviews, as they interacted with colleagues and negotiated the technical and practical details of implementation in the classroom. Chase (2016) extended this line of research by examining the macro-level context that influences how teachers make sense of transfer policy messages in the U.S. Chase (2016) pointed out multiple factors that influence teacher's sensemaking of policy messages, such as institutional identity and self-interest, national narratives, and perception of the target population. Taking these studies together, it can be concluded that teachers are active agents in policy negotiations.

Apart from studies that used sensemaking as a theoretical lens, prior research has used teacher agency to explain how teachers negotiated policy messages that are highly conflicting with their personal beliefs (Bunten, 2014; Newcomer & Collier, 2015). For example, Bunten (2014) used teacher agency as a theoretical framework to analyse how a teacher makes sense of the English-only policy in the U.S. context. Bunten (2014) found that teachers had control over the implementation of policy in the local context, and they selectively implemented the messages that were beneficial to their students. Consistently, Newcomer and Collier (2015) investigated how teachers exercise their agency in responding to the policies of the *Structured English Immersion Program* (SEI) and pointed out that the benefits for the students were the criteria for teachers to decide which messages to pursue for further implementation.

The study

This study was designed as a descriptive exploration into how teachers interpret the PLC policy messages in Thailand. The goal of this study was to describe an existing phenomenon, teacher's interpretation of a policy message, attempting to achieve a better understanding of how teachers interpret the PLC policy in an Asian context of Thailand. A descriptive exploration can provide valuable information about a phenomenon that has never been tackled systematically and appropriately.

Participants

The population comprised secondary school teachers in an educational service area in an eastern province of Thailand. The participants in this study were 217 teachers (representing 15.1% of the population), who volunteered to participate in a PLC workshop, organised by a network of schools. The goal of the workshop was to equip teachers with fundamental knowledge on PLC and how to implement PLC at their school. The demographics of the teachers were diverse in terms of gender and teaching experience. Gender was 75.9% female and 24.1% male. Out of these teachers, the majority (48.9%) were beginning teachers with experience of 1-5 years, 24.9% have taught 6-10 years, 16.9% have taught more than 15 years, and 9.7% have taught 10-15 years. In terms of teachers' prior knowledge of PLC, more than half of the participants (60.4%) had participated in a PLC seminar or professional development at least once, whilst other teachers (39.6%) had not participated in a PLC seminar.

Data collection

To describe sensemaking and agency, a survey research approach was used to examine the trend of teachers' sensemaking and agency to implement the PLC policy in their contexts. The data were collected at a workshop organised by a network of schools to provide teachers with knowledge about PLC. As an expert in PLC, the schools invited the author to talk to teachers about how to implement PLC in their classrooms. The dataset in this study was derived from an online questionnaire delivered prior to and after the workshop. Prior to the workshop, the questionnaire was designed to capture teachers' worldview, prior knowledge of PLC, and general sensemaking of PLC. After the workshop, a

questionnaire was designed to examine the teachers' evaluative stance toward PLC, such as prospective intention to implement PLC, reasons to implement PLC, and sensemaking of PLC. The questionnaire statements were validated by three critical scholars, who have more than five years of experience in constructing questionnaires, theoretically-equipped knowledge of PLC or sensemaking theory and teacher agency, and an insight into PLC contexts in Thailand. Modifications of the questionnaire were made, and the questionnaire was pilot tested. There were 21 questions with a four-point Likert scale in the final version of the questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha was .84.

Data analysis

The objective of this study was to understand the general trend of teacher's interpretation of the PLC policy in the Thai context, so the data analysis was conducted descriptively by using percentages. Bar graphs were selected for visual representations since these can portray key findings quickly and accurately. The data analysis revealed that the teachers responded strongly to the new PLC policy. The strong opinions were created from their previous worldviews toward the macro-political level of policy implementation, filtered through individual cognitive frameworks, and deeply rooted in collective sensemaking. This view is very complicated, thus to represent the data, the survey questions were categorised into five themes with attempts to unpack the complexity of teacher's sensemaking and agency of policy messages: 1) prior worldview of the PLC policy; 2) prospective intention to implement PLC; 3) sensemaking of practicing PLC; 4) sociocultural contexts for sensemaking and agency; and 5) unwelcome truths of the PLC policy. The organisation of the themes was based on the theoretical frameworks. The term "unwelcome truths" was highlighted in the last section because it can capture teacher's authentic sensemaking toward the PLC policy.

Ethical considerations

Prior to completing the questionnaire, the participants were informed of the purpose of this study through a consent form page. They understood that by completing the questionnaire, they granted permission to use their responses for research purposes. The participation was voluntary; the participants could stop anytime while they attempted to complete the questionnaire with no negative consequences to their professional lives. The risks of this study are not greater than any other research in an educational setting. No identifying information was included, in order to protect the participants' confidentiality. The data were analysed and reported in aggregate, so no identification of participants could be made.

Findings

Prior worldview of the PLC policy

To capture the participants' prior worldviews as a starting point for understanding sensemaking, the survey asked the participants two general questions about the PLC

policy: whether they think that PLC is a useful initiative and whether they think PLC is a burden for teachers. Figure 1 below summarises the general worldview of PLC.

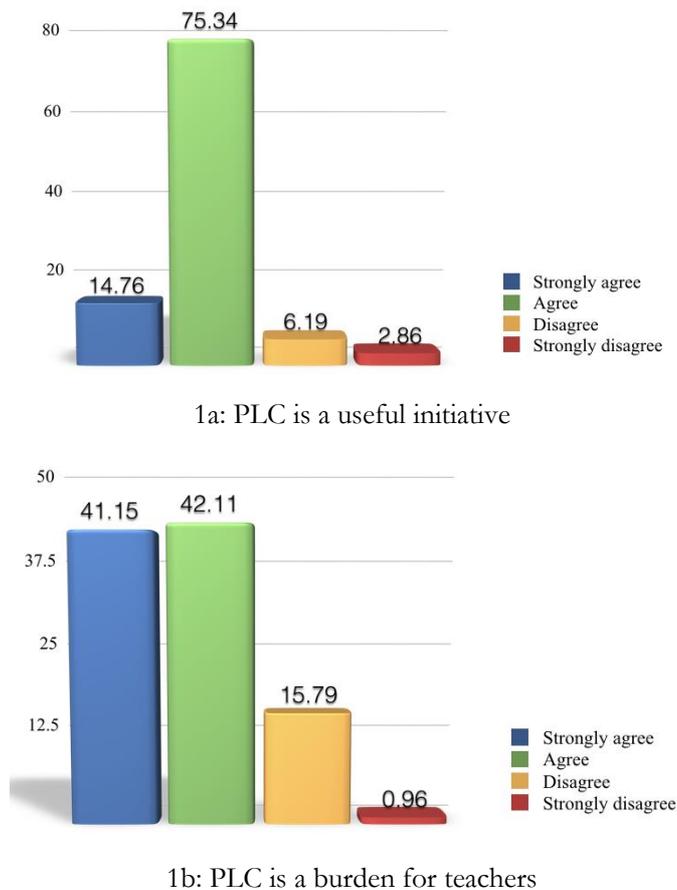


Figure 1: General sensemaking of the PLC policy

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of the participants agreed (75.3%) and strongly agreed (14.8%) that PLC is a useful initiative. However, when asked whether they think that PLC is a burden for teachers, the majority of the participants agreed (42.1%) and strongly agreed (41.2%) with the statement. Based on these responses, it is evident that the participants had mixed prior worldviews about the PLC policy. These mixed worldviews indicate a set of nuanced and complex experiences, assumptions, or expectations about the PLC policy.

Prospective intention to implement PLC

After asking the general sensemaking towards the PLC policy, the survey asked whether the teachers intended to implement this new policy in their contexts. Three questions

were asked: perception of one's adequate knowledge of PLC, prospective intention to implement PLC at their schools, and why they decided to implement PLC. These three questions could capture the intention to engage in negotiating the PLC messages and exercising agency.

The responses indicated that prior to the PLC workshop, the participants had limited knowledge about the PLC policy even though they had participated in at least one PLC seminar. However, after the workshop, they reported that they had more knowledge about PLC. Figure 2 presents the details of the participants' perception of their knowledge of PLC.

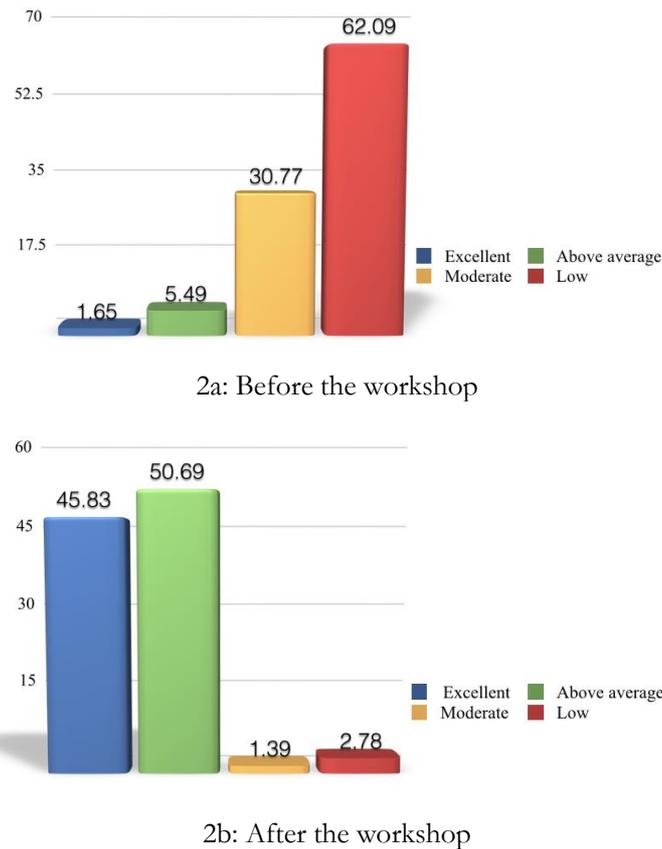
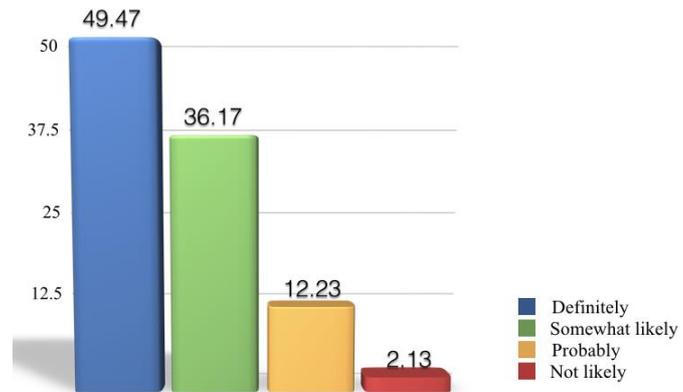


Figure 2: Perception of one's adequate knowledge of PLC

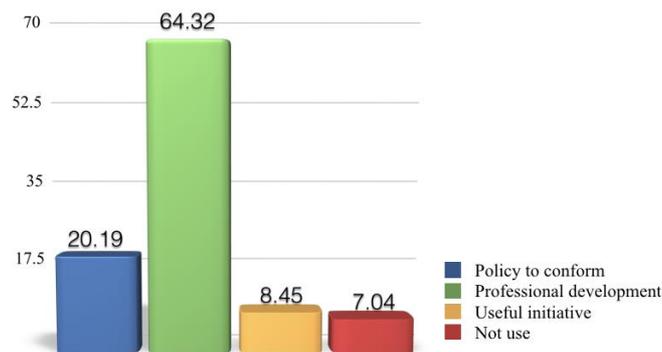
Even though more than half of the teachers (60.4%) reported that they had attended a seminar or professional development on PLC at least once, most participants (62.1%) reported that they had a low-level of knowledge of PLC prior to attending this workshop. A moderate understanding of the PLC policy was reported by 30.8%, whilst only 1.7% of the teachers felt that they had excellent knowledge. However, after the workshop, the majority of the participants reported having more knowledge about PLC; 50.7% felt that

they had above average knowledge and 45.8% felt that they had excellent knowledge of PLC.

To ascertain prospective decisions to implement PLC in their contexts, the survey asked further questions about whether the participants intended to implement the PLC policy in their schools and why they would do so. Figure 3 presents the responses.



3a: I will implement PLC at my school



3b: Why will you use PLC at your school?

Figure 3: Prospective intention to implement PLC

As shown in Figure 3, the majority of the participants (49.5%) reported that they would definitely implement PLC in their contexts, and 36.2 % would implement some parts of PLC. 12.2% of the teachers were reluctant to implement PLC. Interestingly, there were teachers (2.1%) who would not implement the PLC policy. The data manifested a sign of teacher's sensemaking, describing the degree to which teachers selectively decide to implement or not implement the PLC policy in their contexts.

When asking why they would implement PLC, 64.3% of the participants reported that it was a professional development for them. This response reflects the message intended by the Teachers and Basic Education Development Bureau. Surprisingly, 20.2% responded that they would implement PLC because it was simply the policy from the Ministry of Education. The other teachers reported that PLC is a useful initiative (8.5%), and the rest (7.0%) reported that they would not implement PLC. These findings suggest a sign of teachers engaging in exercising their agency; they have underlying reasons why they would act upon certain behaviours.

To capture teacher agency, the survey asked an open question, "I will implement PLC when..." The choices included a variety of reasons. The participants were forced to give only one reason because it can illuminate authentic reasons why they would decide to implement PLC. Figure 4 presents the responses.

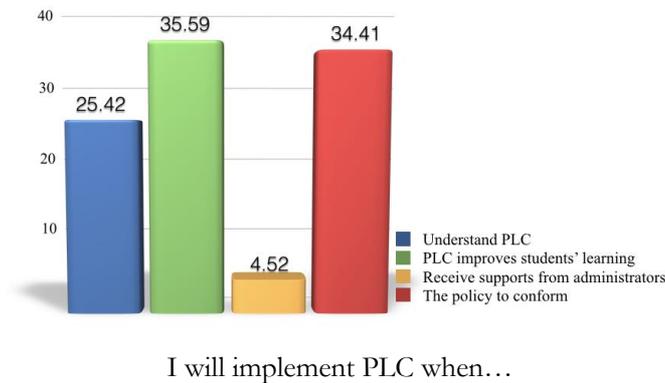


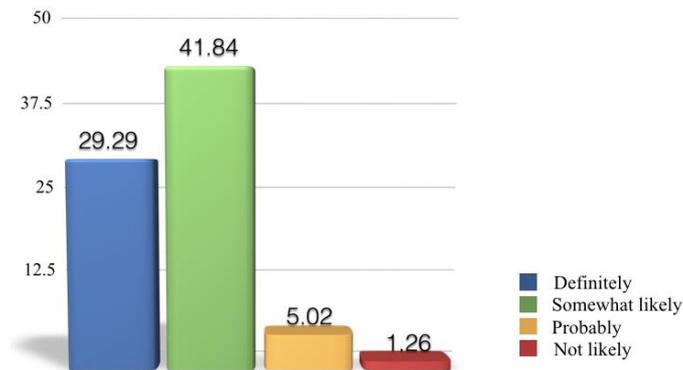
Figure 4: Reasons for implementing PLC

Figure 4 presents two important discoveries. First, most participants (35.6%) reported that they would implement PLC because it might improve student learning, followed closely by because it is the policy to conform (34.4%). These responses show a sign of teachers exercising their agency; they would implement PLC for their students' benefits even though it was simply the policy to conform. Second, 25.4% of the teachers reported that they would implement PLC when they understand PLC, and 4.5% reported that they would implement PLC if they received support from administrators. These responses indicate that teachers make sense of policy messages through individual and social sensemaking; teachers would conform to the policy when they know what they are doing and when they have received external support.

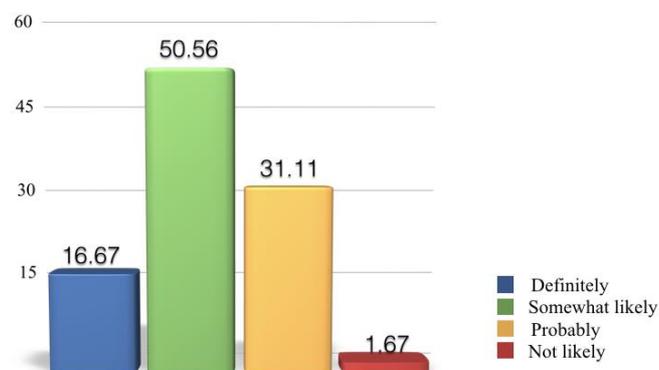
Sensemaking of practising PLC

Besides investigating knowledge and intention to implement PLC, the survey asked about teachers' confidence level to practise PLC. To be able to practise PLC, the teachers must know how to stipulate an appropriate problem to be solved, provide reflections for other

teachers, and implement the PLC steps successfully. In delving into the participants' confidence to come up with an appropriate problem and to provide reflections for other teachers, the participants were relatively reluctant to perform these two important tasks in the PLC steps. Figure 5 illustrates the participants' reluctant responses.



5a: I can come up with an appropriate problem



5b: I can provide reflections for other teachers

Figure 5: Confidence in one's ability to implement PLC

As for the ability to come up with an appropriate problem, the data revealed that the participants were not confident. Most of the teachers (41.8%) reported that they were somewhat likely come up with an appropriate problem to be solved, followed by 29.3% who felt that they were definitely capable of defining an appropriate problem. The others were reluctant about their ability (5.0%) and the rest were definitely not confident (1.3%). In regards to ability to provide reflections for other teachers, more than half (50.6%) reported that they were somewhat likely to perform the task. Surprisingly, 31.1% felt that they were probably able to provide reflection for other teachers. These responses indicated that the teachers were not confidently ready to implement PLC in their classrooms.

Additionally, after presenting the steps of PLC (plan, do, see) suggested to be used in the Thai context, the participants were asked to rate which step they perceived as easiest and which one they perceived as the most difficult. Figure 6 presents the responses.



6a: Easiest step in PLC



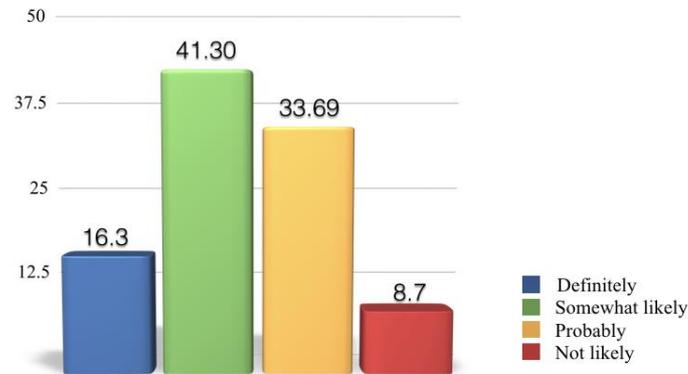
6b: Most difficult step in PLC

Figure 6: Sensemaking of the PLC steps

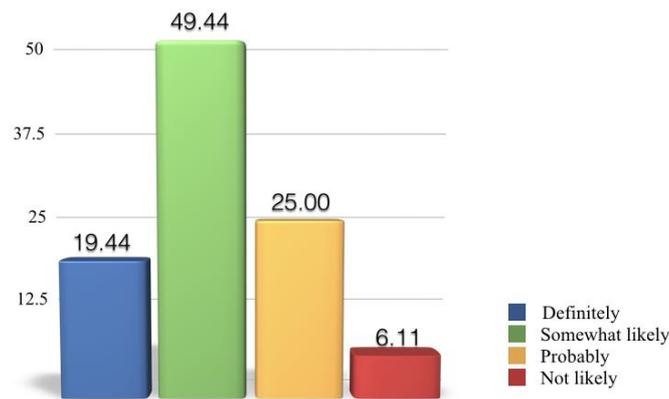
As illustrated in Figure 6, most participants (44.2%) reported that the plan step is the easiest step for them to implement PLC, while the other steps were reported almost similarly: see (22.9%), every step (16.8%), and do (16.2%). Participants reported that the most difficult step was the do step (32.8%), followed by plan (25.3%), see (24.2%), and every step (17.7%). It should be noted that these responses of “plan-as-easy” and “do-as-difficult” reflects how teachers in Thailand perceived the policy makers’ attempts as theoretical; meaning that it is not practical for practitioners. This worldview is common in the broader landscape of policy implementation in Thailand; the public always has a picture of the theoretical-practical divide between policy making and implementation. This public narrative affects how teachers make sense of the policy messages.

Sociocultural contexts for sensemaking and agency

To explore how teachers make sense of policy messages, it is important to investigate their evaluative stances of their sociocultural context in terms of the capacity to provide a shared environment. The survey asked whether they think their schools will be able to create shared values and mission or a collaborative PLC environment. Figure 7 presents the responses.



7a: I think my school will be able to create shared value and mission



7b: I think my school will be able to create a collaborative PLC environment

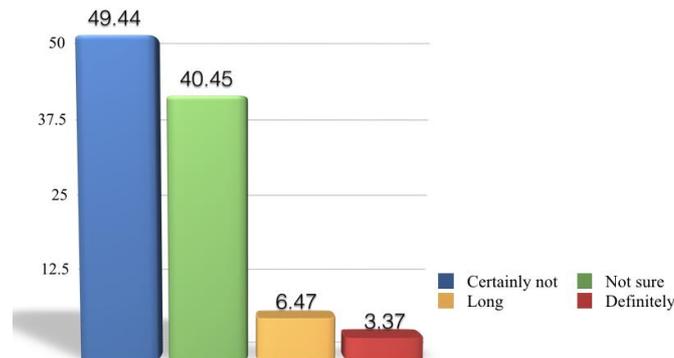
Figure 7: Sociocultural context that supports or hinders the implementation of PLC

As shown in Figure 7, the majority of the participants (41.3%) reported that their schools will be able to somewhat likely create a shared value and mission. Surprisingly, 33.7% of the teachers were not confident about their contexts, and 8.7% reported that their schools were not likely to create shared values and mission. For the ability to create a collaborative culture at the school setting, it was found that almost half of the teachers (49.4%) were somewhat confident, followed by 25.0% of teachers were probably confident about their

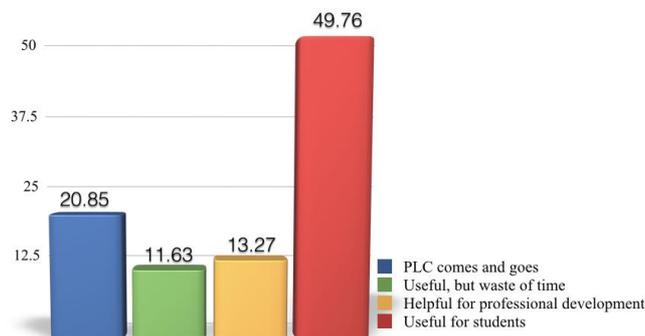
schools. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the participants' schools do not have a supportive professional environment for conducting PLC.

Unwelcome truths of the PLC policy

The final questions were designed to capture teachers' sensemaking from a broader macro-level context. In the past five years, the public has encountered narratives of policy changes which reflected an unstable political context in the Ministry of Education. Two questions were asked: whether they think PLC will be active long term or which statement reflects their true opinion about the PLC policy. Figure 8 presents the responses.



8a: Do you think the PLC policy will be active long term?



8b: Which of the following statements reflects your true opinion about the PLC policy?

Figure 8: Unwelcome truths of the PLC policy

Surprisingly, the majority of the teachers (49.4%) reported that the PLC will not be active long term, followed by 40.5% who were not sure about the length of the PLC policy. When asked for a true opinion of the PLC policy, almost half of the teachers (49.8%) were optimistic that PLC is a useful initiative for students. However, almost one third of the participants (29.9%) felt that the PLC policy likely will come and go. Other

participants thought that PLC is a helpful professional development (13.3%), but it could be a waste of time (11.6%). These responses indicate that the teachers do not trust the stability of the policy implementation since policies always come and go, and are a waste of time. The responses also demonstrate the lack of a profound understanding about PLC.

Discussion

This study is a descriptive exploration of teachers' interpretation of the PLC policy initiative in Thailand, which is a unique case in the Asian context with a collective and hierarchical culture. An online survey was used to collect the data about utilising sensemaking theory and teacher agency. Three key findings were revealed in this study. First, even though Thailand has a collective and hierarchical culture, the teachers exhibited a sign of active agency in reconstructing an understanding of the policy messages. Second, when encountering conflicts, teachers exercised their agency, finding space to act on behalf of their students. Third, the teachers expressed a strong scepticism about the sustainability of the PLC initiative. These findings demonstrate a hidden counter position, rooted in teacher's worldview, toward the policy initiative as impractical in their contexts.

Similar to teachers in the United States context (Bunten, 2014; Coburn, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 1990; Louis et al., 2005; Newcomer & Collier, 2015), within a collective and hierarchical context, teachers in Thailand did not express an indication of being passive policy followers. Rather, they are active agents in reconstructing an understanding of the policy messages. They entered the reconstruction process with a mixed worldview about the PLC policy; it is useful, but it is a burden. This worldview may have resulted from prior experiences with multiple policy changes in the past five years. Teachers were expected to respond to multiple initiatives simultaneously, so a new policy becomes a burden for them. The mixed worldview becomes a cognitive interpretative framework for teachers to make sense of a new policy initiative, deciding which messages are legitimate to be implemented (Spillane et al., 2002). This reconstruction of a policy's meaning implies that the policy itself is inherently problematic (Coburn, 2001). The analysis of the PLC journey indicated that the policy was disseminated inaccurately in the initial stage of implementation, therefore it is not surprising that teachers formed a resistance to the policy because the messages were not going to be executed. Therefore, tension occurs while teachers attempt to conform to the policy.

However, the teachers reported that they would be able to manage a space for exercising their agency in order to deal with the tension arising during the implementation. The teachers decided to conform with the policy as long as it would be beneficial to their students. The findings are consistent with previous studies in United States contexts (Bunten, 2014; Newcomer & Collier, 2015). It can be concluded that even though the teachers in Thailand work in a collective and hierarchical culture, they did not hesitate to fight for their students by finding latitude to act on behalf of their students. In other words, teachers do have control over the policy (Bunten, 2014).

Moreover, the teachers in this study expressed a strong scepticism over the stability of the PLC policy; they possessed a perception that this policy will be short-lived. When they did not believe that the policy would last long, it is implied that they are highly observant about changes in the policy implementation. Based on this view, teachers do not wait for the policy makers to dictate what they should or should not do. Rather, they observe the changes around them and form this observation into their worldviews, to be used for future interpretations of the policy initiative. This negative view towards the policy initiative might be accommodated into the cognitive framework for interpreting a prospective policy.

The implications derived from this study are theoretical and practical. Through the combination of sensemaking theory and teacher agency, I was able to capture how teachers interpret, adapt, or decide to implement the PLC policy messages in the classroom. The two theories were able to explain this phenomenon in the Asian context with a collective and hierarchical culture. Policy makers should be aware of the sensemaking process in which teachers are actively engaged when implementing a policy. They should also listen to the teachers' voices in the field and incorporate those voices in a policy. This will limit the gap, resistance, and tensions between policy makers and practitioners. In so doing, it has implications about finding appropriate strategies to enforce the policy implementations.

Conclusion

An exploration into how teachers interpret policy messages is an important research area. The findings of this study contribute to an understanding of how teachers in the Asian context, which has a collective and hierarchical culture, make sense of the policy messages. The interpretation of the findings in this study should be conducted cautiously, because of the limitations in a descriptive and explorative research design. This study is only descriptive, so generalisations should be made cautiously. Also, it should be noted that the data in this study were self-reported. As a result, it may not reflect the true behaviour of the teachers as to whether or not they actually implemented the PLC policy in their schools. Future research should employ a qualitative research approach to investigate in detail how teachers interpret, adapt, or implement policy messages. Exploration along this line of research will yield a rich and deep description of the sensemaking process and teacher agency.

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