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Lived Experiences of Teachers in Professional Learning Communities in Transient School Environments

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Lived Experiences of Teachers in
Professional Learning Communities in Transient School Environments

by
Katelyn M. Jones

An Applied Dissertation Submitted to the
Abraham S. Fischler School of Education
and School of Criminal Justice in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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This applied dissertation was submitted by Katelyn M. Jones under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

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Statement of Original Work

I declare the following:

I have read the Code of Student Conduct and Academic Responsibility as described in the Student Handbook of Nova Southeastern University. This applied dissertation represents my original work, except where I have acknowledged the ideas, words, or material of other authors.

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Katelyn M. Jones
Name

March 21, 2020
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Abstract

Lived Experiences of Teachers in a Professional Learning Community in a Transient School Environment. Katelyn M. Jones, 2020: Applied Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education and School of Criminal Justice. Keywords: Professional learning community, South Korea, transient teachers, primary school

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are increasingly being used in South Korean elementary schools in order to improve student learning and the quality of teaching. This new educational trend is being funded by provincial offices of education but facing some difficulties in implementation and sustainability. School leaders, teacher leaders, and teachers are struggling to understand the purpose of professional learning communities and how to use them to improve student learning and the quality of teaching. In addition, South Korean elementary school teachers are transient, as they rotate to new schools every two to three years. This impacts their ability to build trust and communication, two fundamental components within a PLC.

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of veteran elementary school teachers with PLC experience in Chungbuk Province, South Korea. To accomplish this, the researcher collected data by conducting a series of two individual interviews with each of the six participants.

Four themes emerged from data analysis: (a) officially voluntary, unofficially mandatory, (b) policy, not reality, (c) drawing the short straw for leadership, (d) vehicle for venting. The findings of this study will assist provincial offices of education in helping elementary schools implement and sustain PLCs. The data analyzed will also help school leaders, teacher leaders, and teachers identify fundamental components of PLCs that need to be understood and developed in order to be successful.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Learning, collaboration, and accountability among teachers lead to effective student learning and achievement. When educators receive and participate in high-quality professional development, it has a positive impact on their quality of teaching and their students' learning achievement (Blank, 2013). In order to attain quality teaching and effective student learning, schools around the world are implementing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Brody & Hadar, 2015). PLCs consist of educators working together to reach a common goal related to improving education and student learning. PLCs need shared leadership and the commitment of all members in order to build a culture of learning and create school change that improves student learning and achievement. (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). However, the success of a PLC resides solely in the effort put forth by its members to learn together, work together, and hold themselves accountable (DuFour, 2004). That being said, ineffective PLCs exist in schools around the world. One reason for ineffective PLCs is low collaboration and conflict among PLC group members (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). Low collaboration and conflict in PLCs have been linked to the idea that, traditionally, the teaching profession has been an isolated profession in which teachers educate students in their own classrooms without outside influence (Murray, 2014). In addition, low collaboration can occur in PLCs because a lack of time available for teachers to build trust (Demir, 2015; Sims & Penny, 2015). Low collaboration and conflict among teachers in PLCs occur at the global, national, and local levels.

Over the past decade, the implementation of PLCs in South Korea has increased. South Korean elementary, middle, and high schools have been focusing on implementing

and sustaining PLCs. However, low collaboration has been identified as one reason why PLCs in South Korea have not been as effective as they could be in improving teacher learning and student achievement (Seo & Han, 2012). In one study, South Korean teachers reported that they preferred working in groups with members having similar work experience and job titles (So & Kim, 2013). So and Kim noted that this could be because of the underlying hierarchical culture of Korean schools. Therefore, when teachers with varying levels of experience and job titles are asked to work together in a PLC, low collaboration and conflict may be present. In addition, South Korean schools are transient environments in which school leaders and teachers rotate to new schools every two to three years, limiting the amount of time spent building trust and collaboration.

The topic. The topic of this proposed qualitative research dissertation is the implementation and sustainability of PLCs in transient school environments. Although PLCs have been used for many years in western educational settings, as a form of teacher professional development in order to improve student learning and achievement, they are in the beginning stages of implementation in South Korea. When creating and implementing a new PLC, it is important to focus on the relationships among PLC participants. DuFour and Marzano (2011) identify team learning and collaboration as key elements of effective PLCs. However, when teachers do not have the opportunities to build trusting relationships with each other, it can cause conflict and difficulties when participating in collaborative PLC activities, like teacher observations and constructive feedback (Murray, 2014). South Korean schools are traditionally hierarchical, with strong government influence on curriculum and policy (J.S. Choi, 2010). Hairon and Dimmock (2012) argue that hierarchical school systems in East Asia need time to understand the true

intent of PLCs and assist teachers in developing communication and collaboration skills in order for their PLCs to be effective and worthwhile. Further research is needed on PLCs in South Korea to better understand why low collaboration and conflict exist, and how to improve PLC implementation and sustainability in transient school environments.

The research problem. The research participants for this qualitative research dissertation are South Korean veteran public elementary school teachers in Chungbuk Province with experience implementing and sustaining a PLC in a transient school environment. The majority of South Korean public schools are struggling to implement and sustain PLCs, so insight is needed to better understand why this is happening. Therefore, a qualitative research study needs to be done to explore the lived experiences of veteran teachers participating in PLCs in a transient school environment, and how these teachers make meaning out of their role in the PLC process regarding shared leadership and communication with novice teachers.

Background and justification. The modern education system that is known in South Korea today has only been in existence for roughly sixty-five years. Over those sixty-five years, the purpose of education has changed from developing an industrialized workforce to creating a knowledge-based society (Lee, Kim, & Adams, 2010). The shift in education to creating a knowledge-based society took place in 1998 (Lee et al., 2010). At that time, the South Korean Ministry of Education (MOE) reformed the curriculum to focus on student-centered learning to promote the skills needed to collaborate and work in a globalized society (G. Choi, 2010). However, prior to 1998, teaching styles were teacher centric, with a strong focus on rote-learning and test prep. This teaching style and school

culture, which are influenced by hierarchical beliefs, are difficult to transition out of, even if education policy states that it is to be done (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012).

In South Korea, student-centered approaches are written as educational policy, but teacher-centered strategies and mentalities among teaching staff are still dominant. Navigating the best teaching approaches to improve student learning and achievement is one function of PLCs (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). Because of the competitive nature of South Korea, the government is trying to increase the quality of public school education and public school teachers, so parents are not burdened with the financial costs of supplemental education to ensure their child's future success (Lee et al., 2010). One approach being used in South Korean public schools, for improving the quality of education and teachers, is PLCs (Lee & Kim, 2016). The creation and implementation of PLCs originated in the American education system as a solution for school reform.

The American education system has been implementing school reforms since the 1950's in order to meet the growing needs of students and provide a quality education for all (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). After *A Nation at Risk* was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1983, it was clear that the American Education system needed serious improvements, so for the next decade top-down as well as bottom-up reforms were implemented (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). The reforms were meant to restructure schools as a way of helping them "transition from an industrial age to an information age" (Horn, 2002, p. 231) in order to improve student learning and equip students with the skill set they would need for a new era. However, these reforms were unsuccessful, leaving many questioning the entire school system (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). After the failed reforms of the 1980's and early 1990's, there was bipartisan

agreement that the traditional factory model and school culture of American public schools was no longer working, and it was time for less government reform and more school-based reform (Ravitch, 2010). There was an understanding that if schools were run more like businesses with more autonomy, then innovation would occur, and improvements would be made (Ravitch, 2010). This is when PLCs started to gain more mainstream attention from the educational community.

Educational researchers first discussed the idea of PLCs in the 1960's, with a more directed research approach and understanding taking place in the 1990's after the failed reforms of the 1980's and early 1990's. Educational researchers and leaders took a more direct approach by adopting Peter Senge's business concept of the learning organization (Williams, Brien, & LeBlanc, 2012), which is a process for fostering workplace collaboration and creative thinking in order to create change and improve results (Senge, 2006). When educational researchers adopted this concept, they changed the name from learning organization to learning community (Hord, 1997). A PLC can be defined as a collaborative process through which school change occurs in order to improve student learning and achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011; Murray, 2014). Transforming schools from the traditional factory model and school culture into learning communities was the new strategy for school reform (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). More focus was placed on establishing a culture of learning and support among school leaders and teachers, as a way of improving student learning and achievement (Morrissey, 2000). Until now, PLCs have only grown in popularity and support as they are being implemented in schools worldwide as a vehicle for school change.

However, there are difficulties with implementing and sustaining PLCs in South Korea because of the teacher-centered mentality that exists among school leaders and teachers. Existing research from a 2012 quantitative study on PLCs in South Korean public schools, reveals that PLCs exist, but they are not as effective as they could be in improving the quality of education and teaching because of low collaboration among PLC members (Seo & Han, 2012). Kim and Lee (2013) found that teachers working together in a PLC in a South Korean public school faced difficulties in collaborating because of differences in their perspectives on teaching styles, years of teaching experience, and the subject they specialized in. Hairon and Dimmock (2012) researched PLCs in Singapore, an East Asian country that is similar in educational beliefs and practices to South Korea. The researchers found that collaboration was difficult when implementing the western concept of PLCs into Singapore schools because of the hierarchical nature of communication within the culture. Research supports the claim that low collaboration hinders the implementation and sustainability of PLCs (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011; Murray, 2014).

Deficiencies in the evidence. PLC research is a common area of study in education communities in order to improve teacher quality and student learning. This proposed qualitative research dissertation will fill two academic gaps that exist in PLC literature. First, more research needs to be conducted on the perspectives of veteran teachers working together with competent and novice teachers (Brody & Hadar, 2015). Current research mainly focuses on how novice teachers navigate the PLC process. This proposed qualitative research dissertation will explore how veteran teachers navigate the PLC process in transient school environments in South Korea, while negotiating leadership and

communication in order to build a culture of learning within the PLC. Second, more research is needed on how PLCs are implemented and sustained in cultures outside of North America (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). At present, the majority of PLC research comes from schools or educators in stable, North American school environments. Cultural differences can affect how PLCs are implemented and sustained in educational settings around the world.

   Audience. School leaders and educators in South Korea will benefit from reading this proposed qualitative research dissertation. School leaders are responsible for encouraging and motivating their teachers to improve student learning and achievement (DuFour and Eaker, 1998). As PLC participants, teachers are responsible for collaborating and handling disagreements in order to work toward the goals of the PLC. Reading this qualitative research dissertation will give school leaders and educators insight into how veteran teachers in South Korean public elementary schools feel about their lived experiences in PLCs. In addition to school leaders and educators in South Korea, school leaders and educators in other East Asian countries, with similar educational cultures to South Korea and transient school environments, will benefit from reading this qualitative research dissertation. Because PLC research in East Asian school cultures is limited, this qualitative research dissertation will provide insight into how PLCs function in the East Asian school context.

Purpose of the Study

   The purpose of this qualitative research dissertation is to investigate the lived experiences of veteran teachers participating in the PLC process in transient school environments in South Korea. A specific focus will be placed on shared leadership and

communication with novice teachers in order to build a culture of learning. School leaders and teachers, as well as educational professionals and researchers, are struggling with the implementation and sustainability of PLCs in South Korean public schools. The school context for successful PLCs originated in North America, an educational environment in which teachers tend to stay in their specific schools for their whole career. The lived experiences of veteran teachers adopting PLCs and implementing them in transient school environments, in a completely different culture, need to be researched in order to determine its applicability.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The altruistic goal of education is to provide all students with the opportunity to learn and develop their skills, understandings, and knowledge. In order to achieve this, schools need highly-qualified educators with the ability to encourage, motivate, and improve student learning and achievement. Highly-qualified educators are not just book smart teachers who focus on their own teaching; rather they are educators who are willing to collaborate and grow by both learning from and sharing with fellow teachers and educational professionals. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are established and implemented in schools as a process for educators to work together to improve student learning and achievement, by improving their own teaching skills, understandings, and knowledge.

The vast majority of research studies on the PLC process as a means for student improvement have been done from a North American perspective (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). However, education systems outside of North America, who are seeking school change, have also started implementing PLCs (Stoll et al., 2006). South Korea, a country that boasts high student achievement scores among all Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (Kim & Cho, 2014; Lee, 2014), is one of those systems. With recent education reforms giving schools more autonomy, school leaders in South Korea have started exploring ways in which they can improve the learning experience and increase an already high level of student achievement (Kim & Cho, 2014; Lee & Park, 2014; So, Shin, and Son, 2010). The new goal in Korean education reform is to adopt educational practices that focus on holistic learning with an emphasis on student creativity and

critical thinking (Lee & Park, 2014). The PLC process is one of those educational practices that is being used to convert South Korean schools into learning communities that can develop well-rounded, high-achieving students (Seo & Han, 2012). However, limited research studies have investigated this phenomenon in South Korea (Kang, Cha, & Ha, 2013; Park & So, 2014), as the concept of transforming schools into learning communities was only introduced over the past decade (Seo & Han, 2012). Therefore, the aim of this literature review is to explore the PLC process. The purpose of this literature review is to examine common misconceptions and implications of shared leadership, school culture, school change, and student improvement in the PLC context.

Theoretical Perspective

This qualitative research dissertation used the Sociocultural Theory as a theoretical lens. Sociocultural Theory was developed by Lev Vygotsky and is commonly used in educational research (Anh & Marginson, 2013). Sociocultural Theory establishes the idea that learning is influenced by others, as well as by cultural and social beliefs and attitudes (Vygotsky, 1978). This lens allowed the researcher to explore the roles of teachers and school leaders in the cultural context of a South Korean elementary school during the collaborative learning process. It is believed that mastery of a specific practice does not just happen through books and resources, but instead, true mastery can occur through consistent interaction and collaboration in a social setting with those who have already mastered it (Collins, 2001).

Within Sociocultural Theory, Vygotsky developed the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential

development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Through collaboration, learners develop new knowledge and skills, so that they can utilize them independently. Once they have mastered the new knowledge or skills independently, they can help others develop the same knowledge and skills. When transforming schools into PLCs, school leaders and teachers become learners that develop through collaboration. In Sociocultural Theory, both experienced and less experienced group members contribute to what is being learned, practiced, and mastered (Tenenberg & Knobelsdorf, 2014). Sociocultural Theory is an accurate theory in the study of PLCs, as it is used to argue how individuals influence the community, and how the community influences individuals (Gallucci, 2008: Van Lare & Brazer, 2013).

In addition, Sociocultural Theory recognizes that cultural and social beliefs of the group can play an important role in how learning takes place (Sprow Forte, 2013). Cultural and social beliefs can define how group members interact with each other and what roles within the group they identify with (Zapata, 2013). PLCs in multicultural societies are comprised of individuals with varied social and cultural beliefs that can each influence how the group collaborates. In South Korea, a homogeneous society, Confucius hierarchical values are deeply ingrained in cultural and social beliefs, making group harmony a deeply valued component of collaboration (Ryu & Cervero, 2011). Likewise, ingrained respect for elders and the cultural and social belief of not questioning them is dominant in Confucius societies like South Korea (Park & Lunt, 2015). Therefore, the researcher also used the cultural lens of Confucianism in this qualitative research dissertation. Exploring the role of the collective societal and cultural beliefs of South

Korean elementary school leaders and teachers in the PLC process will provide a deeper understanding of how collaborative learning takes place in this setting.

Conceptual Framework

Cultural lens of Confucianism. This qualitative research dissertation used Confucianism as a cultural conceptual lens. Confucianism is a theological and ethical beliefs system created in China and developed in depth by Confucius and his disciples in 479 BC (Yao, 2000). There are three fundamental powers of Confucianism: heaven, earth, and humans (Yao, 2000). These three principals work in harmony and are used to lay the foundation for Confucianism. Confucians believe that "Heaven is the source of a meaningful life and has provided human beings with the virtuous roots or beginnings of humaneness, righteousness, propriety and wisdom" (Yao, p. 154). It is the role of humans to develop these virtuous roots or beginnings through education and self-cultivation, so they can separate themselves from the behaviors of animals. Humans cultivate a moral life through their own experiences and their interactions with others (Yao, 2000). Modern Confucians identify Confucianism as a shared living culture and believe that Confucius traditions and values are still present in East Asian countries. This secondary lens helped the researcher interpret the findings from the cultural point of view of South Korean society. Understanding the values and traditions of a culture, helps to understand how people within that culture interact and behave.

South Korean Culture

South Korea is a racially and ethnically homogeneous society that has been culturally influenced by Confucius beliefs from around third century AD (Peterson & Margulies, 2010). Koreans view themselves as a collectivist society that share the same

bloodline and culture (Ha & Jang, 2015). Sleziak (2014) found that although Korea has experienced rapid development and is strongly influenced by globalization, there is still a strong perception of Confucian values and beliefs ingrained within society. Most notably, the strong belief that a well-structured education system that focuses on exams and grades is the fundamental basis for a successful life (Sleziak, 2014). A successful life, by Korean standards, is one that includes going to a top ranked university, getting what is deemed a good job by society, and earning a lot of money to support your family. The OECD Better Life Index 2016 reports that South Korea ranks above average in education and skills, jobs and earnings, as well as civic engagement and personal security. However, it has been reported that overall life satisfaction in South Korea is below average with a 5.8 grade out of 10, with the OECD average being 6.5.

This sentiment is also reflected in South Korea's education system. So and Kang (2014) report that there are serious problems within South Korea's educational system as a result of strict emphasis on grades and exams. The researchers report that South Korean students, although among the top ranked in international achievement assessments like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) since 1995, are ranked below average in interest in learning and happiness. The intense pressure for students to do well on high-stakes exams in South Korea is considered a strong factor in suicidal thoughts and actions (Wang, 2016). For over a decade, South Korea has ranked highest in suicides among OECD countries. This is not limited to adults, as high rates of suicide occur among children in primary and secondary schools. The South Korean Ministry of Education (MOE) is working with educational professionals, administrators, and teachers in order to increase

interest in learning and overall happiness, as well as ensure the health and well-being of all South Korean students.

South Korea and PLCs

South Korean schools have started implementing PLCs to create school change and transform traditional schools into learning communities in order to improve the overall student learning experience and student achievement (Seo & Han, 2012). PLCs started gaining popularity over the last decade, as school-based reform, meaning reform that is developed and implemented by individual schools, became a method for school improvement (So, Shin, and Son, 2010). Since then, school leaders have started focusing on teacher learning within the PLC process and reconsidered their approach to teacher professional development. Teacher professional development in South Korea has historically been a passive experience in which teaching experts transmit knowledge to teachers through government approved teacher training programs (So & Kim, 2013). However, with current research studies placing importance on teacher collaboration and learning, some South Korean schools have started experimenting with the PLC process (Park & So, 2014). Unfortunately, schools are not successfully transforming into PLCs and a large majority are exhibiting low collaboration (Seo & Han, 2012).

The school site for this qualitative research dissertation is an exemplary case of the PLC process in an average South Korean public elementary school. An average South Korean public elementary school is government funded and provided with teachers and school leaders who have been trained at government run National Universities of Education. The curriculum and school culture of the National Universities of Education are similar across South Korea in order to ensure all future teachers and school leaders

are equally trained and prepared. In addition, teachers and school leaders in South Korean

public elementary schools rotate to new schools within their city or province every two to

three years, creating a transient school environment. The school sites used for this

qualitative research dissertation are typical schools that have been trying to implement

and sustain PLCs. In a country where the majority of public elementary schools are

struggling to transform into PLCs, it is important to understand the lived experiences of

teachers who are participating in and leading them.

Misconceptions of PLCs

A common misconception is that a PLC is a program that schools implement to

create change. Instead, a PLC is a process, a vehicle to deliver school change (Hall &

Hord, 2011). When a school decides to become a PLC, they are choosing to create school

change and make that PLC process part of their school culture (Fullan, 2001; Mullen &

Schunk, 2010; Owen, 2014). Being a part of the school culture means a PLC is ongoing

and continuously working to improve the school and its teachers in order to improve

student learning and achievement. Another misconception is that when a group of

teachers conduct meetings with each other, they are forming a PLC. However, regular

teacher meetings do not constitute a PLC; in order to be a true PLC, members must create

shared goals and collaborate through learning in order to reach those goals (National

Council of Teachers of English, 2010). Because school leaders and teachers have

misconceptions surrounding PLCs, educational experts have created fundamental

components of PLCs to help guide the process.

Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker, respected educational researchers and PLC

experts, identify the fundamental components of a PLC as (a) shared mission, vision,

values, and goals; (b) collective inquiry; (c) collaborative teams; (d) action orientation and experimentation; (e) continuous improvement; and (f) results orientation (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Each of these components is summarized from DuFour and Eaker (1998):

Shared mission, vision, values, and goals. When schools want to use the PLC process they must first develop a shared mission, vision, values, and goals. This is done collaboratively with all members of the PLC as a way of ensuring everyone contributes and has a clear understanding of the school change taking place through the PLC. Creating a shared mission is the first step in the PLC process, as it enables members to consider the fundamental purpose of their school. Once all members agree on why they exist as an organization, they need to determine what they want to become and how they want to get there. Establishing a shared vision gives PLC members direction in the change process, as the shared vision is what the PLC members are striving to become. Next, PLC members need to determine how they are going to act in order to transform their school into their shared vision. A set of values outlines the "specific attitudes, behaviors, and commitments" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 88) necessary for all PLC members to exhibit in order to achieve the shared vision. Last, the group needs to define a series of goals and establish benchmarks and deadlines in order to achieve them. Goals are used as a way of assessing the progress being made in reaching the shared vision. The next component focuses on the collective inquiry of all PLC members.

Collective inquiry. Collective inquiry takes place when all members of the PLC challenge norms and seek improvement through research, application, and reflection. PLC members take initiative to solve problems through testing out new methods and ideas they have researched and reflecting on those methods and ideas with each other.

Through collective inquiry, PLC members become more skilled and knowledgeable, helping them build a culture of learning. The next component explains the importance of collaboration.

Collaborative teams. The PLC process is a collaborative journey. In order to achieve the shared vision, teams of PLC members work to accomplish the established goals. The PLC process is only successful if all PLC members work together. The next component describes the necessary skills of PLC members.

Action orientation and experimentation. Members of the PLC are always testing new theories and methods and learning from those theories and methods. PLC members develop action research skills and adopt the belief that through practice and experiment, learning and improvement takes place. The next component identifies a fundamental belief of PLC members.

Continuous improvement. During the PLC process, members strive for continuous improvement. They do this by working together, making inquiries, researching, experimenting, and reflecting on the outcomes. The final component of DuFour and Eaker's fundamental components of a PLC is a focus on results.

Results orientation. The PLC process is trying to achieve school change that helps improve student learning and achievement. In order to accomplish this, the PLC needs to assess results throughout the process. By assessing the results, the PLC understands what is working and where they are in the change process.

DuFour and Eaker's six fundamental components have been adopted by educational researchers and school leaders. The components are interconnected and need to all be present in the PLC process. However, even if PLCs have all six components,

they are not guaranteed to be successful in their implementation and ability to achieve their goals. DuFour (2004) insists that the dedication and hard work of the PLC members is what determines their level of effectiveness and success in student learning and achievement. Hall and Hord (2011) conclude that as the efficacy of dedicated educators working in collaborative PLCs increases, these educators are more likely to implement new changes in their classrooms in order to improve student learning and achievement. In order for PLC members to make an effort and engage in the PLC process, they need strong leadership.

In the field of education, leadership is not reserved solely for one individual, but instead for all educators (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). School leaders and teacher leaders need to envision the change that must occur in order to improve their schools, themselves, and their students' learning and achievement. Leadership within the PLC context is no different, as school leaders and teacher leaders work together to solve real-time problems and implement direct changes in their schools and classrooms (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011). Collectively, school change occurs through collegiality and shared leadership as the school itself becomes a PLC.

Shared Leadership and School Culture in PLCs

Shared leadership is a fundamental component of an effective PLC (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011; Hauge, Norenes, & Vedøy, 2014; Hord, 1997; Murray, 2014; Wilhelm, 2013). School leaders and teacher leaders have to openly communicate, teach each other, and learn together (Murray, 2014). A school leader's role in shared leadership needs to be a

combination of providing teacher leaders with direction and support, as well as being able to learn from and collaborative with them (Hauge et al., 2014; Hord, 1997; Murray, 2014; Wilhelm, 2013). Teacher leaders must also be able to inspire and collaborate with school leaders and fellow teacher leaders, as well as teachers and staff involved in the PLC (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997). Carpenter (2014) concluded that shared leadership positively impacts how members of a PLC collaborate with each other. In order to best understand the PLC and its leadership, it is necessary to know who is involved and how they help create, implement, and sustain change within the PLC process.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) argue that a PLC involves school principals, teachers, and parents. In 2011, DuFour and Marzano added that the school district and teacher leaders are also a crucial part of the PLC process. The involvement of the school district, school leaders, teacher leaders, teachers and staff, and parents is a complex relationship in which all affected and involved need to have a shared vision and understanding of the change taking place.

School district. School district leaders need to provide direction and empowerment in regard to the changes they want to see within their schools. In order for a school district to support schools during the PLC change process, superintendents, school board members, and principals need to work together to define the goals, how they will achieve those goals, how they will monitor progress, and the language that will be used during the change process (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Ongoing, lateral communication, as opposed to top-down management, has proven more effective at the district level for PLC creation, implementation, and sustainability (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). In addition, in order for effective school change, school district leaders limit the

amount of school change initiatives, instead utilizing the PLC as the overall approach to school change (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

School principals. School principals play an important role in the PLC and the change process that accompanies it (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). However, the role of the principal is not a traditional role in which he or she dictates the change (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Instead, the principal is committed to working collaboratively with teacher leaders, teachers, and staff members (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). DuFour and Eaker (1998) believe principals who want their PLCs to be successful must,

> (a) attend to the building blocks of a professional learning community; (b)
> communicate the importance of mission, vision, values, and goals on a daily
> basis; (c) create collaborative structures with a focus on teaching and learning; (d)
> shape the school culture to support a professional learning community; (e) foster
> an approach to curriculum that focuses on learning rather than teaching; (f)
> encourage teachers to think of themselves as leaders; (g) practice enlightened
> leadership strategies; (h) establish personal credibility; (i) be fixated on results; (j)
> recognize that continuous improvement requires continuous learning. (196-199)

Teacher leaders. Teacher leaders are fundamental in the success of PLCs, as they lead individual PLCs within the overall school PLC. For example, teachers within individual grades may form a PLC to solve problems and create changes specific to the needs of the students within their grade. In addition, specialized department teachers, such as Math, Language Arts, or Science, may create a PLC to tackle the challenges that arise in student learning across grades, but within their subject. Teacher leaders

participate within these PLCs and create necessary changes in their classrooms to improve student learning and achievement. This is why school district leaders and principals need to support and help develop teacher leaders' leadership skills (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Teachers and staff. When an entire school is transitioning into a PLC, the only way for it to succeed is if all teachers and staff believe in the vision and create the change needed in their classrooms (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). However, DuFour and Eaker (1998) argue that in order for teachers and staff to take on that responsibility, they need to be treated as professionals whose jobs demand they be life-long learners, who pursue ongoing training, licensing, and certifications. In addition, teachers and staff need to defy the traditional role of a teacher in that it is a secluded job that takes place behind closed doors (Murray, 2014). Instead, they need to embrace collaboration and work together to improve student learning and achievement.

Parents. Parental involvement in student learning and achievement is proven effective (Adamski, Fraser, & Peiro, 2013; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2015; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Gonida & Cortina, 2014). DuFour and Eaker (1998) establish a framework for school-parent partnerships in a PLC consisting of the following six standards,

Standard one – Communicating: Communication between the home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.

Standard Two – Parenting: Parenting skills are promoted and supported.

Standard Three – Student Learning: Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.

Standard Four – Volunteering: Parents are welcome in the school, and their

support and assistance are sought.

Standard Five – Making Decisions: Parents are full partners in the decisions that

affect their children.

Standard Six – Collaborating with the Community: Community resources are

used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning. (p. 252-253)

In order for improvement in student learning and achievement, a collaborative

effort between school district leaders, school principals, teacher leaders, teachers and

staff, and parents needs to exist. When these complex relationships come together and a

PLC is effectively created, implemented, and sustained, the traditional school culture is

challenged, making way for a new culture of learning to emerge.

The PLC process challenges existing school culture, with the intention of

transforming it into a culture of learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano,

2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011; Murray, 2014). Schein (2010)

emphasizes the importance of leadership in his research on the fundamental principles of

building a culture of learning. He also discusses the significance of facilitating

opportunities for leading and learning for all members, at all levels, as well as for

ensuring their commitment to the change process. Shared leadership and shared

commitment to the PLC process help transform schools into learning cultures. Murphy

(2015) notes the difficulty though, in changing the school culture, because historically

teachers have worked under the cultural assumption that their role was to educate, not

lead. The PLC process disturbs this commonly held belief, as it insists that school change

only happens when teachers share leadership responsibilities with school leaders.

Chapman, Leonard, Burciaga, and Jernigan (2013) conducted a qualitative case-study on informal, semi-formal, and formal leadership among Mathematics educators, who were working toward improving student learning and achievement in mathematics within their school PLC. The researchers found that having three tiers of leadership improved their ability to create a culture of learning, as PLC participants at every level felt they were learning together and contributing to student improvement. In addition, it is equally crucial for the superintendent to participate in learning in order to build a strong culture of learning within the school (Psencik, Brown, Cain, Coleman, & Cummings, 2014). Shared leadership in the PLC process is what contributes to the successful transformation of schools into cultures of learning.

Communication in PLCs

Communication within a PLC is fundamental and needs to be open and lateral (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011). Participants need to feel comfortable communicating their ideas, as well as their feedback to other PLC members and school leaders. When establishing a PLC, all aspects of promoting communication need to be considered. Rawding and Call (2016) conducted a study on PLCs among Math educators in an elementary school in North America and found the importance of providing PLC participants with a physical environment and materials that promote communication. Successful PLCs are those that enable open communication through providing time and space for that communication to occur (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011). Sims and Penny (2015) conducted a qualitative case study on a failing PLC and found that one reason the PLC failed was because PLC members were not given the time

or space to communicate and collaborate with each other. In order to create school change to improve student learning, PLC members must be provided the time and space to communicate and collaborate.

Creating School Change to Improve Student Learning

Schools implement the PLC process as a tool for creating school change. As schools engage in the PLC process, they strive to make necessary changes to improve policies, practices, or procedures that directly impact student performance and outcomes (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007). Strong leadership from both school leaders and teachers is needed, as the change process is often resisted by those accustomed to current practices within the system (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). DuFour and Marzano (2011) believe that educators become more effective when schools become better, highlighting the need and importance for leaders, teachers, and staff within the school to improve as a way of improving the school as a whole. In addition, Cooper et al. (2016) discovered that conditions within the school context are constantly altering throughout the PLC change process, causing instability. During a time of change, in order to make sense of a somewhat chaotic system, leadership at all levels is needed as a constant that guides the school toward a learning culture. However, school change is a complex feat that can be mishandled due to common mistakes. DuFour and Eaker (1998) note Kotter's (1996) eight common mistakes in the change process and claim that making even one mistake can derail school change when building a learning community. The mistakes include,

> (a) allowing too much complacency; (b) failing to create sufficiently powerful guiding coalition; (c) underestimating the power of vision; (d) under

communicating the vision by a power of 10; (e) permitting structural and cultural

obstacles to block the change process; (f) failing to create short-term wins; (g)

declaring victory too soon; (h) neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the culture.

(DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 51 – 53)

Creating school change is a big picture implication for effective PLCs, as PLCs

are used as vehicles for achieving school change. Successful school change through the

PLC process is dependent on the commitment of both the school and the district to

recognize the importance of time, collaboration, top-down support, and resilience when

implementing PLCs to improve student achievement (Wells & Fuen, 2013, p. 250).

In addition, investments need to be made in teacher development, and strong

relationships of trust, loyalty, and support need to be forged between the school district,

school leaders, teachers, and the community (Hökkä & Eteläpelto, 2014). However, too

much trust and loyalty between members of a PLC can inhibit the change process,

because those members may lack diverse thinking that helps create true change (Watson,

2014). School change that occurs through the implementation of a PLC, is not change

that is immediately seen, but change that takes place over time with committed PLC

participants (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). Time is needed for true change to be seen, as

change is a complex process, not a single event (Hall & Hord, 2011). When school

change takes place in the PLC process, student learning improves.

Improving student learning and achievement is regarded as the driving force

behind implementing and sustaining PLCs (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano,

2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011; Murray, 2014). Murray (2014) identifies

the first step in developing an effective PLC as comprehending student achievement in

terms of where it is and where it should be. This requires PLC members to look at various data sources, specifically those outlined in Murray (2014) from Learning Forward (2011) as,

> (a) performance on classroom assessments; (b) performance on standardized tests; (c) collections (such as portfolios) of real student work; (d) formal and informal evaluations of real student work; (e) descriptive information about student work and work processes (how students accomplish work). (p.40)

The data from the five sources from Learning Forward (2011) give PLC members an idea of student performance and behavior in relation to school standards and improvement needs.

Owen (2015) found that through effective PLCs, students improved with regards to "achievement, social skills, emotional aspects, independence and creativity" (p. 57); however, the researcher noted that most evidence supporting the connection between PLCs and improved student learning is from the perspective of the case-study participants. Owen (2015) calls for further research using multiple data sources and broader samples to prove PLCs truly improve student learning and achievement. In addition, Allen (2013) insists that improving student achievement is the collective responsibility of all educators within a PLC. However, Harris and Jones (2010) insist that teacher collaboration on its own does not ensure improvement in student learning and achievement. Instead it is a complex combination of all factors of an effective PLC that truly help improve student learning and achievement. Without them, problems arise, and the PLC process can be derailed.

Problems Implementing and Sustaining PLCs

It is known that the fundamental components of an effective PLC, along with stakeholder support, need to all be present in order for the school change process to exist, student improvement and achievement to increase, and learning cultures to be developed and sustained. Unfortunately, this is not always the case as schools attempt to transform into PLCs. The most common problems associated with PLCs include limited or poor leadership and the inability to create a shared vision, mission, values, and goals. When there is limited or poor leadership, the PLC process is jeopardized, and student learning and achievement is negatively affected. In addition, when there is no clear vision, mission, values, or goals, there is no direction, leading to lack of commitment and involvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011; Murray, 2014).

Furthermore, low collaboration can also negatively affect the PLC process. Collaboration is the process of cooperating with others through the sharing of ideas and practices (Chan, 2015). Williams (2013) noted that collaboration is a key step in building a culture of learning. Through both quantitative and qualitative data collection, the researcher found that educators in a PLC, who made collaboration time a priority, were successful in developing a learning culture. These educators did not solely use allocated PLC time, but maximized time "before school, in the hallways, during lunchtime, and at other times in the day" (Willaims, 2013, p. 37). However, lack of collaboration is cited as a reason for PLC failure (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011; Murray, 2014). Seo and Han (2012) found that PLCs in South Korean schools presented evidence of low teacher collaboration and called for

further studies in the South Korean school context, as the school culture in South Korea differs greatly from that of the Western school context in which the majority of PLC research is conducted.

Low collaboration in schools has been connected to time constraints, trust issues, and conflicts (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011; Murray, 2014). Time constraints occur when time for collaboration is not made a priority, or available, hindering the success of a PLC. Sims and Penny (2015) carried out a qualitative case study on PLC participants' perceptions of their PLC in a high school setting that experienced limited to no improvement in student learning or achievement. A key finding from that study was a lack of time made available for collaboration. When PLC members collaborated, they primarily discussed the data of low-performing students, because they did not have sufficient time to have a detailed discussion on instructional practices that could be used to improve student learning in their classrooms. In addition, without time, teachers lack the ability to build the trust needed to effectively form relationships and collaborate with one another (Demir, 2015). Liou and Daly (2014) found both quantitative and qualitative support indicating that teachers participating in a PLC are more likely to positively receive feedback and advice from colleagues and administrators if there are high levels of trust in their relationships. It can be inferred then that when there are low levels of trust, less collaboration and willingness to accept feedback is present. Schechter (2012) adds that without a learning culture and trust, teachers might misconstrue feedback as criticism, instead of as a crucial part of the learning process. In line with these findings, Van Tassell (2014) found that without adequate time to build the trust needed, learning improvements are not made.

High levels of trust mean higher levels of student improvement (Ash & D'Auria, 2013).

Leaders can foster a trusting PLC by:

(a) genuinely caring about teachers' professional growth and success in the
classroom; (b) modeling vulnerability and demonstrating openness to continuous
learning; (c) working with teachers through conflict to achieve common goals; (d)
demonstrating a willingness to make unpopular political decisions that address
student needs. (Ash & D'Auria, 2013, p. 44)

 Finally, without the time needed to build trusting relationships, conflicts can

occur. Conflicts within a PLC negatively affect collaboration (Murphy, 2015). Saiti

(2014) found that conflicts are prevalent in school settings, hindering progress and

student improvement. Conflicts among teachers and school leaders increase when there is

a lack of leadership (Saiti, 2014). Sasson and Somech (2014) add that affective conflict,

which is conflict based on "perceived personal disagreements" (p. 759) inhibits

colleagues from collaborating and achieving their work goals. In addition, Kise (2012)

found that in PLCs, conflict also arises because of "misunderstandings of how colleagues

learn and communicate" (p. 40). Fairman and Mackenzie (2012) conclude that PLC

members can overcome conflict through the development of leadership skills that include

conflict management and resolution. Investing the time and effort into building trusting

relationships decreases conflict and increases collaboration.

PLCs in Transient School Environments

The transient school environment exists in South Korea as a way of ensuring

equal access to high quality education for all students, regardless of their socio-economic

status (Moodie & Feryok, 2015). Because of this policy, South Korean students from low

socioeconomic backgrounds have greater access to more educated and experienced

teachers (Luschei, Chudgar, & Rew, 2013, p. 30). This system is not unique to South

Korea, as it is the policy in a vast majority of East Asian countries, including Japan,

Singapore, and China. This system is deemed possible and effective because the school

environment is considered standardized, as the central government controls school policy

and curriculum (Kang & Hong, 2008). However, with more school-based reforms taking

place in South Korea, and more South Korean school leaders pushing for their schools to

transform into PLCs, it is necessary to investigate how PLCs exist in transient school

environments, and how school leaders and teachers help build and sustain a culture of

learning.

      PLCs need the commitment and support of all school leaders, teacher leaders,

teachers, and staff in order to implement and sustain an effective PLC (DuFour & Eaker,

1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011; Murray,

2014). When school leaders and teachers are consistently rotating from one school to the

next, it is difficult to commit to and implement a culture of learning. However, research

indicates that South Korean schools have the characteristics of PLCs (Seo & Han, 2012),

but more studies in the South Korean context are needed to understand the full extent of

PLC implementation and sustainability (Park & So, 2014). The transient school

environment in South Korea benefits low socioeconomic students (Luschei, Chudgar, &

Rew, 2013; Moodie & Feryok, 2015), but little is known on how PLCs exist in this kind

of environment. With the majority of PLC research being done in stable, North American

school settings (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, &

Thomas, 2006), there is no research on the implementation and sustainability of PLCs in transient school settings.

In addition, teacher leaders help build and sustain a culture of learning over time (Marzano & DuFour, 2011). Time allows them to gain the trust they need from other teachers and staff in order to establish collegiality and work together to improve student learning and achievement (Demir, 2015; Sims & Penny, 2015). Time is also needed to sustain the learning community (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010). As teachers and school leaders are in different stages of their two to three year contract with one school, there are always changes being made among PLC members. Exploring how school leaders and teachers build and sustain a culture of learning, while dealing with limited time in one school environment, will give insight into how PLCs can successfully be implemented and sustained in transient school environments.

Gaps

The field of PLC research is rich with studies from North America (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012; Stoll et al., 2006). However, there is a gap in PLC research from outside of the North American school setting (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). This qualitative research dissertation fills the specific academic gap identified by Park and So (2014) and Seo and Han (2012), calling for more research studies on PLCs in the South Korean school context. The school culture and teacher practices in South Korea are different than those of Western school settings and need to be further researched in order to understand how PLCs can be implemented and sustained (Seo & Han, 2012). In addition, as South Korean schools are using PLCs to create school change and build a culture of learning,

further research is needed on the role of the teachers and how they communicate with each other for collaboration and learning purposes (Park & So, 2014; Seo & Han, 2012).

The South Korean school system has one distinguishing difference from the vast majority of settings in which previous PLC studies have taken place. That difference is that the South Korean schools are transient environments in which school leaders and teachers are coming and going every two to three years. PLC research stresses the importance of time in order to build the trust needed to collaborate and learn together (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fogarty & Pete, 2007; Hall & Hord, 2011; Murray, 2014). When there is time to build trust and collaborate, PLCs are successfully implemented and sustained. However, in South Korea low collaboration is cited in PLC research (Seo & Han, 2012), and schools are having difficulty implementing and sustaining them. This qualitative research dissertation will investigate the lived experiences of teachers participating in the PLC process in South Korean public elementary schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide this qualitative research dissertation:

1. What are the lived experiences of South Korean veteran elementary school teachers when navigating the six fundamental components of a Professional Learning Community?

2. What are the lived experiences of South Korean veteran elementary school teachers regarding shared leadership in a Professional Learning Community?

3. What are the lived experiences of South Korean veteran elementary school

    teachers when navigating communication and building a Professional

    Learning Community?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Aim of the Study

The aim of this chapter is to justify the phenomenological research approach, which was used to explore how veteran teachers in transient school environments in South Korea navigate the PLC process, especially in terms of shared leadership and communication within the PLC. This chapter explains the qualitative research approach, as well as discusses the participant selection process, data collection tools, procedures for collecting data, and data analysis. In addition, the issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, potential bias, and study limitations are addressed.

Qualitative Research Approach

The researcher used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in order to collect data for this qualitative research dissertation. IPA is a qualitative research approach that allows participants to reflect, interpret, and understand their own lived experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012). In this approach, participants describe their own interpretation of their lived experiences, and through this, a deeper understanding of the phenomenon emerges (Lester, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). IPA is described as being idiographic, meaning specific focus is placed on the unique interpretation of the individual regarding their own lived experience (Smith et al., 2012).

In this qualitative research dissertation, the researcher chose IPA because understanding the unique lived experiences of veteran teachers participating in PLCs in transient school environments in South Korea, will provide the reader with a better understanding of the phenomenon. The qualitative research dissertation explored the lived experiences of veteran teachers in regard to shared leadership and communication within

the PLC to better understand how PLCs are developed and sustained in transient school environments. IPA was chosen as the best approach for this qualitative research dissertation, as the lived experiences of the participants will give insight into the PLC process in transient school environments.

Participants

In this qualitative research dissertation, six participants were selected from schools in South Korea that have implemented and sustained a PLC in a transient school environment. It is important that all participants selected have experience with the same central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, the criteria used for selecting the participants is as follows, (a) the participant must be a South Korean native, (b) the participant must be a veteran teacher, (c) the participant must have experience participating in a PLC, and (d) the participant must be willing to engage in English in-depth interviews. The researcher recruited six participants meeting the above criteria through professional connections and referrals from other participants through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling occurs when it is difficult for the researcher to recruit qualified participants for the study (Creswell, 2012).

This sampling strategy helped the researcher recruit qualified participants by receiving recommendations from other participants (Creswell, 2012). South Korean culture places great importance on human relationships and networking, making snowball sampling the most effective sampling strategy. The researcher contacted a leading educational researcher in South Korea, who trains teachers and has a database of teachers in his network. He assisted in identifying teachers in his network who met the criteria for this qualitative research dissertation. After identifying appropriate candidates, he provided

their contact information. The researcher e-mailed potential participants and explained the

goals of the study. The email script is found in Appendix A. The researcher arranged a time

to meet with each interested participant in order to obtain consent and to set up an interview

schedule. The letter of consent is found in Appendix B. The researcher worked to build a

trusting relationship with each participant and asked them to recommend other qualified

participants to join the study, thus enabling the snowball sampling strategy.

All participants who chose to join the study did so voluntarily and had the

opportunity to opt out of the study at any time. The privacy, personal information, and

safety of all participants was a priority throughout this qualitative research dissertation

and was regarded with the highest care and consideration. Therefore, the participants

were involved in selecting the interview times and location, so that it suited their needs

and assured that they were comfortable throughout the interview process.

Data Collection Tools

Data was collected using audio recordings of two in-depth interviews with each

participant. The researcher developed a questionnaire that was used as the interview

protocol. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, with the first two sections

covering questions regarding demographics and South Korean schools. The third section

included questions covering participants' lived experiences of PLCs, specifically

regarding the six fundamental components of PLCs, shared leadership within the PLC,

and communication within the PLC. The fourth, and final section, asked the participants

to reflect on their experiences. The questions were developed by referencing DuFour and

Eaker's (1998) text on the fundamental components of PLCs, including shared leadership

and communication. In order to ensure the questionnaire's reliability and validity, the

researcher used an expert panel to provide feedback and revisions. The expert panel

consisted of two experts in PLC research in South Korea. The experts ensured that the

purpose statement, research questions, and questionnaire were all aligned. After the

questionnaire was reviewed by an expert panel, the researcher piloted the questionnaire

with two individuals who met the participant criteria but were not included in the

research study. After receiving feedback and making revisions from the pilot, the

researcher finalized the questionnaire.

Procedures

The researcher first sought IRB approval in order to conduct the qualitative

research dissertation. The contact information of initial participants of this dissertation

study was provided through a professional connection's database of teachers. The

professional connection has been advising the South Korean Ministry of Education

(MOE) on elementary school policies regarding leadership and professional development

for over five years. In addition, he is a published researcher and professor, who has been

conducting research in elementary schools throughout South Korea for over twenty years.

This has allowed him to create a database of elementary school teachers, who qualify as

research participants.

After IRB approval was granted, the researcher e-mailed potential participants to

invite them to participate in the study. The researcher provided the participants with

information regarding the purpose of the proposed qualitative dissertation study, their

role in the study, and a general timeline for the interview process. The email script is

located in Appendix A. When a participant agreed to participate in the study, the

researcher scheduled a time to meet for consent and to set up the first of two one-hour

long interviews. The researcher used the letter of informed consent provided by the IRB. After the letter was signed, it was kept in a secure location in order to maintain confidentiality. The participants were already knowledgeable about the dissertation study, as that information was provided in the initial meeting. In addition, participants were told they would be given aliases to guarantee anonymity.

Interview one. The first interview focused on building trust and rapport between the researcher and the participant. The interviewer asked questions on demographics and the lived experiences of the participant regarding the academics and social relationships in South Korean schools. In addition, the interviewer explored the participant's experiences in a transient school environment, as well as current issues taking place in South Korean elementary schools. The researcher also made note of whether the participant joined the PLC voluntarily or if it was a mandatory obligation. At the end of the first one-hour long interview, the researcher asked the participants if they could recommend additional participants that meet all requirements for the study.

Interview two. The second one-hour long interview was scheduled a week after the first interview. This allowed the researcher time to transcribe the first interview and reflect on its content. During the second interview, the interviewer asked the participant to describe, from their own experience, a PLC. The interviewer then asked the participant to describe their lived experience regarding the six fundamental components of a PLC, shared leadership within the PLC, and communication within the PLC. This interview focused more on the detailed experiences of the participants within their PLC. Throughout the interview, the interviewer strived to understand the participant's meaning of their lived experience. The participant was asked to reflect on their experience and

how their lived experience has shaped their present teaching practices, as well as their future teaching practices in order to improve student learning and achievement. Finally, the researcher thanked the participant for their participation in the study.

Data Analysis

The researcher began the IPA process of data interpretation and analysis by focusing on one participant's single case. After extensively interpreting and analyzing the first case, the researcher moved on and conducted the same in-depth analysis of each of the other participants' cases, one by one (Smith, et al., 2012). Each case was treated as its own individual case, and thus after each case was given equal, in-depth analysis, the researcher looked for patterns across the cases.

Data organization needs to be detailed and well designed for all information gathered during a qualitative research study (Creswell, 2012). When analyzing the data, the main goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of veteran South Korean teachers participating in a PLC in a transient school environment. Data analysis included reading transcriptions and listening to audio recordings multiple times, practicing coding, and determining patterns and emerging themes (Creswell, 2012; Smith et al., 2012). When interpreting and analyzing data in an IPA study, there is a six-step process.

1. Reading and re-reading;

2. Initial noting;

3. Developing emergent themes;

4. Searching for connections across emergent themes;

5. Moving to the next case;

6. Looking for patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2012, 82-101).

Step one. The first step in the IPA data analysis is the reading and re-reading of all initial information collected during the interview process. The researcher began by listening at least two times to the audiotapes of the participant's interviews. While listening the second time, the researcher simultaneously followed along with the transcription. The researcher then proceeded to re-read the transcription until the researcher was fully knowledgeable of the data regarding the participant's single case. In order for the researcher to move on from step one, the researcher needed to fully comprehend the data (Smith et al., 2012). This is why the researcher spent adequate time listening to the audiotapes and reading and re-reading the transcripts. Step one of the IPA process provides the researcher with the fundamental knowledge and understanding of each single-case, so that the researcher can structure the data for further analysis (Smith et al., 2012).

Step two. The second step of the IPA data analysis is the initial noting of the ways in which the participant describes his or her lived experience of the central phenomenon (Smith et al., 2012). The researcher made note of the language used by the participant and how that language was used to interpret the participant's understanding of his or her lived experience. This step requires the researcher's attention to detail when taking notes on the data collected from the audiotapes and transcriptions. During initial noting, the researcher began to document, interpret, and analyze the data on a basic level (Smith, et al., 2012). This helped the researcher identify specific language and content that assisted in developing emergent themes.

Step three. The third step of the IPA data analysis is developing emergent themes. This step is complex as it requires the researcher to reexamine the data and determine

which information is pertinent to the study, and which is of no value (Smith et al., 2012). To accomplish this task, the researcher focused on the notes taken in step two and analyzed the language used to help develop emergent themes within the data. When developing emergent themes, it is important for the themes to be a conceptual understanding of the participant's original thoughts, as interpreted and analyzed by the researcher (Smith et al., 2012).

    Step four. Step four of the IPA data analysis is searching for connections across emergent themes. The researcher had already developed a variety of chronological emergent themes while reexamining the data in step three. It was then the responsibility of the researcher to examine the emergent themes and determine any and all connections between them (Smith et al., 2012). This included the researcher's interpretation of how the themes fit together to best understand the participant's lived experiences regarding the central phenomenon.

    Step five. Step five of the IPA data analysis is moving on to the next case. Up until this step, the researcher had only interpreted and analyzed the first single-case of one of the participants in the dissertation study. The researcher then repeated steps one through four for each of the participants in the dissertation study and maintained that each case was treated as its own study (Smith et al., 2012).

    Step six. Step six of the IPA data analysis is looking for patterns across cases. This step requires the researcher to interpret and analyze all of the emergent themes within each case, and determine any patterns that occur (Smith et al., 2012). The researcher practiced coding during this step and identified which themes best represented the overall data collected.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting research for this qualitative research dissertation, the researcher maintained the ethical guidelines put forth by Creswell (2012), while at the same time maintaining the trust of the participants. Being fully aware of potential ethical issues that may be present in a qualitative research study equipped the researcher with the tools needed to successfully conduct the qualitative research dissertation.

In order to maintain the ethical guidelines, the researcher first provided each participant with a detailed understanding of the study and how the data will be used. Each participant signed a letter of informed consent and was assured that at any time throughout the study they were able to drop out. In addition, the anonymity of each participant was protected by using pseudonyms. Finally, all data collected from each participant has been secured on a password protected computer and will be destroyed within three years.

In qualitative research, ethical considerations need to be made because researchers and participants spend considerable amounts of time together discussing detailed experiences about the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). A qualitative researcher needs to anticipate any potential ethical considerations that could arise throughout the research study. Creswell (2012) identifies the first steps in the ethical guidelines of a researcher as,

> Informing participants of the purpose of the study, refraining from deceptive practices, sharing information with the participants, being respectful of the research site, reciprocity, using ethical interview practices, maintaining confidentiality, and collaborating with participants. (p. 30)

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is needed to ensure the credibility of the research study. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this dissertation study, the researcher engaged in member-checking. Member-checking can be done both formally and informally and adds to the validity of the research being conducted (Creswell, 1998). Member-checking allowed the participants to read through the transcribed notes and correct any errors they felt had been made during the interview process or add any information they felt was necessary for the study. This helped the researcher to collect the most accurate and true data from the participants in the dissertation study.

Potential Bias

The researcher's potential bias for this qualitative research dissertation was a preconceived view of South Korean schools. The researcher has lived and worked in South Korea for over ten years, in which time the researcher has experienced a conservative, hierarchical school culture and system of communication. The researcher's experiences are that top-down communication is the norm, not the exception, and that school culture strictly focuses on teacher-centered practices. Having worked directly with public elementary school teachers, the type of participants involved in the study, the researcher has witnessed a type of hierarchy that bullies teachers into following the practices of veteran teachers or school leaders.

On multiple occasions, the researcher has discussed with South Korean elementary school teachers why they are not willing to incorporate the new student-centered teaching practices they have learned into their classrooms. The teachers have all responded with the same general idea that veteran teachers show animosity toward newer

teachers when they use new teaching strategies. This is because the veteran teachers believe it reflects poorly on those teachers who have been there longer, because they are not using them. The researcher's knowledge is that PLCs are highly collaborative and student-centered, requiring all participants to work collaboratively with each other.

The researcher managed potential research bias by practicing reflexivity and bracketing. Reflexivity is the practice of self-reflection (Creswell, 1998). The researcher maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process, noting systematically how and why decisions throughout the process were made. The researcher was able to use these notes to reflect and eliminate potential research bias. This occurred as the researcher reflected back on decisions made throughout the research process, with regards to the researcher's own interests and ideals. This allowed the researcher to learn from any potential research bias and identify any future bias that may occur. In addition, bracketing allowed the researcher to reflect on any potential bias and focus on the specific lived experiences as interpreted by the participants who had lived through them. By practicing reflexivity and bracketing, the researcher ensured the qualitative research dissertation was free of any potential bias.

Limitations

The qualitative research dissertation has limitations. The sample only includes educators working in PLCs in transient school environments in South Korea. It does not address other countries and cultures that also participate in transient school environments. Transient school environments are standard throughout countries in Asia in order to maximize the accessibility of highly qualified and effective educators. In addition, potential participants with rich data may have been overlooked because of their lack of confidence

in working with a native English-speaking researcher. One criterion for the participants in this study was that they had to be proficient and willing to engage in English in-depth interviews. This could have limited the data collected in the qualitative research dissertation. In spite of the above limitations, the researcher worked hard to produce a dissertation study that is beneficial to the field of PLC research.

Chapter 4: Findings

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of six elementary school teachers participating in a PLC. Through a series of in-depth interviews, each participant was able to share their own experience. Several common themes emerged from these experiences, although unique to each participant. This chapter will begin with background information on each of the participants, and then the common themes will be described: 1) Officially voluntary, unofficially mandatory, 2) policy is not reality, 3) drawing the short straw for leadership, and 4) vehicle for venting.

Participants' Background

The researcher interviewed six elementary school teachers working in South Korean public elementary schools. All six of the participants are South Korean females with more than eight years of teaching experience. Because of South Korean law mandating that all public school teachers must rotate schools every two to three years in order for all students to have equal access to quality education, all participants have taught at three or more schools depending on their experience. In addition, all participants have a minimum of two years' experience participating in different PLCs in the same province in South Korea. The researcher discusses each of the participant's backgrounds below.

Shin. Shin has been an elementary school teacher in South Korean public schools for eight years. She has taught at three different schools, both as a homeroom teacher and as a specialized English as a second language teacher. Her experience includes teaching grades one through six. Shin has been participating in her school's PLC for two years. When asked if the PLC was mandatory or voluntary, she said it was voluntary, but the

principal pressured all teachers in her school to join. Because Shin is currently working as a specialized English as a second language teacher, her PLC is not subject specific and includes a total of ten teachers. Each of these teachers are specialized in either English as a second language, Physical Education, Music, or Ethics. Within their PLC, they do not discuss anything specific to their specialized subjects, instead they focus on teaching strategies and methodologies. In addition, they spend a lot of their time discussing how to control and handle student behavior. As specialized teachers, they do not spend as much time with the students as homeroom teachers, so they have more trouble controlling the students. Shin explained that the education policy in her province changed two years ago, the education board eliminated testing from elementary schools and now encourages teachers not to give students homework. They are trying to focus more on individual education that helps develop the students' creativity and social skills. She completely agrees with the changes but believes there is a gap between policy and reality.

> I completely agree with this change, and many other teachers I work with do, too. However, we have a lot of other work now, not just for the students' academics. What I mean is, we cannot easily adjust to this policy change because we need more time to observe and get to know the students and participate in our PLC. This is what most teachers in my school think.

At Shin's current school, all teachers must be in school from 8:40 a.m. until 4:40 p.m.; however, the majority of teachers stay at school until 6:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. doing additional paperwork. This schedule has improved over the last few years, as schools have been giving teachers more time throughout the school day to get their paperwork done. Unfortunately, Shin believes it is still not enough time. Finally, Shin explained that

the biggest issue facing elementary school teachers in South Korea is the lack of respect

they receive from parents. In the past, teachers were highly respected, but now most

parents treat them as day care providers.

  Kang. Kang has been an elementary school teacher in South Korean public

schools for seventeen years. She has taught at six different schools in two different

provinces. The province she spent most of her teaching years in is one of the most

progressive provinces in terms of education in the whole of South Korea. The province

she is currently teaching in has recently started to implement more progressive

educational policies, such as PLCs. She has two years of PLC experience from her former

province and three years of PLC experience in her current province. Because of her PLC

experience, she is in charge of the PLC at her current school. When asked if her PLC is

mandatory or voluntary she laughed.

   Actually, the office of education has said, this is totally voluntary. It's officially,

   on paper, voluntary. However, as I'm sure you know, in my school's case, it's

   kind of mandatory. Every single full-time teacher has to participate in a PLC in

   my school.

Kang explained that in her former province, the office of education encouraged teachers

to participate in PLCs through explaining the benefits.

   They told us about their experiences and how it is helpful for their teaching and

   their students. They presented a lot of information about PLCs and gave us lots of

   encouragement. They emphasized that you don't need to do any kind of

   paperwork in this PLC. You can just draw or write; no paperwork is necessary.

   But, in this current province, they need something confirmed, they want to see

something and know what is going on. Actually, this office of education needs

official paperwork, but my former province did not.

The formality of the PLC at her current school puts a lot of pressure on the teachers, in

addition to their other work. Kang explained that when she first started working at her

current school, three years ago, she was confused by how the teachers reacted to new

educational policy changes. Most specifically, the elimination of exams and homework.

She said that although the school eliminated formal exams, teachers in the same grade

were still assessing their students using the same, formal exams. The policy is that all

teachers need to assess students using creative, open-ended assessments designed

specifically for their own students. However, the teachers in her school felt this was too

much work for them, so they shared standardized exams among themselves. Kang said

most teachers are changing and creating open-ended assessments, but not all teachers.

> That is the rule, open-ended assessments. Some of the teachers or principals or
>
> vice principals, honestly, they just don't understand how to reorganize the
>
> curriculum and do the assessments. The curriculum needs to be linked to the
>
> assessment, but they don't understand that. They don't understand how all
>
> teachers can have different exams on different dates.

This is one thing Kang focuses on when leading her PLC. The PLC she is in

charge of is for all third grade teachers in her school, and she tried to best help them

adapt to new policy changes. She said PLCs are the current trend in South Korean

elementary education, and a lot of emphasis is being placed on student-centered learning.

However, not all teachers fully understand how to use or manage the PLC, it is just

policy.

Lee. Lee has been a public school teacher in South Korean elementary schools for eight years. She has taught at five different schools as a specialized English as a second language teacher and homeroom teacher. Lee is in her third year at her current school, where she is a second grade homeroom teacher. At previous schools, she was a third grade homeroom teacher and sixth grade homeroom teacher. Lee decided to first participate in a PLC four years ago, because the woman who ran the PLC was very well known and Lee wanted to learn from her. She volunteered in her first PLC and was so impressed by it that she was determined to run her own PLC when she rotated to a new school. Lee has been running a PLC for second grade teachers at her current school for the last three years. When asked if PLC participation is mandatory or voluntary, she said that she considers her participation to be voluntary because she started the PLC and genuinely wants to participate. However, she explained that other teachers feel pressured to participate by the principal, so they consider it mandatory. Her PLC consists of four teachers including Lee. Each grade in her school runs a PLC, but they do not interact or share any information with the other PLCs. Lee explained that her PLC's focus is to help teachers learn how to teach in more student-centered, creative ways. She explained that since the office of education policy is to eliminate tests and homework, many teachers have struggled to adapt their teaching.

> Some teachers in my school, I think about half, find it difficult. But changing is a very important thing in the educational system, so they have to change. In my PLC, some teachers participate because they know they have to change, so they want to learn about flexible learning classrooms.

Lee expressed her open-mindedness to all of the progressive educational changes that the office of education is implementing, but she doesn't think it is easy for all teachers because it is an extreme change from what they have done for decades. She thinks PLCs could be at the center of all the new changes in the classroom, but teachers need more time and training.

  Kim. Kim has been a South Korean elementary school teacher in the public schools for eleven years. She has taught at three different schools as both the homeroom teacher and a specialized English as a second language teacher. Her teaching experience has mainly been with students in grades five and six. Kim has participated in five different PLCs, all of which have been voluntary, except her current PLC, which is mandatory. At Kim's first school, a lot of the teachers felt pressure from the principal to teach students how to do well on their government regulated exams. She and several of her coworkers felt frustrated about the academic pressure students, as well as teachers, were facing.

> After the exam, the government went through the results and they ranked the order of the schools. They informed the school rank to the principal, so the principal felt stressed. Then they would push the teachers, saying you are weak, and we need to get a great result on this exam. At that time, I had such a hard time.

She recalled when the exams and homework were eliminated from elementary schools, and how she and her coworkers started their first PLC as a way to learn new teaching methods that would engage the students in a creative way. Kim reflected back on her

early days of teaching and the mandatory government exams, and how her opinion on academics changed.

> That exam made me think about new, different teaching skills. I think that exam helped start my PLC, because my coworkers and I, at that time, were exhausted. My thinking about academics changed. Before we started that first PLC, I thought good academics meant practicing and solving problems.

A few years later, Kim took on an important role at her second school as curriculum developer. At that time, a new, more progressive superintendent of education was elected in her province.

> At that moment he wanted to change everything, change teachers' way of thinking. But many teachers didn't agree with him, especially the older teachers. When I was in this school, my job was to make the curriculum for the school, so I had many chances to listen and join programs about new teaching skills. I think it was a good chance for me. But when I got back to school, I had to be mindful of the other teachers and that they didn't agree with that. The education office, they pushed people like me that I had to change something in my school. I think I stood in the middle, it was such a hard time.

Kim worked as a teacher and curriculum developer up until last year. She was transferred to a new kind of school in her province called an "alternative school", which is a pilot school for new, progressive educational policies in her province. The teachers at this school mandatorily participate in PLCs and work to develop new ways of teaching that improve student learning and happiness. She explained her first experience meeting with the teachers at the alternative school.

Most South Korean teachers like to obey the principal or the government office, but these teachers do not. I was so shocked last year, because last year I went to that school for the first time. The first meeting, every teacher said something, even if that opinion disagreed with the principal. That's why I was so shocked. At other South Korean schools, when the teachers discuss things and make a result, if the principal says it's not a good idea then they all think it's not a good idea. But this school is shocking because what the principal says is just one single opinion, it has the same power as us.

Kim will return back to a regular South Korean public school next year but is worried about several educational trends. She wants to help make elementary schools more progressive but thinks that parents' perspective of the role of the school and teachers will hinder that. She thinks that parents, as well as South Korean society, don't believe in South Korean public schools. Kim believes this is because of the private after-school education market that upskills South Korean students in all of their public school subjects. She explained that respect for teachers is decreasing as public perception of schools as care facilities is increasing.

I think it is ironic because at school, academics are changing but after-school academies are not changing. It is ironic because the parents tell me during our parent-teacher conferences, please make my kid happy and enjoy their time at school. They say they don't want their kids to have stress because of studying, but they go to after-school academies and pay money and tell those teachers, please make my kid study very hard, you can even hit them. Even though I have just eleven years of experience, I can feel as time goes by, the students' condition is

getting worse. They are getting nervous and anxious. I think South Korean society

is anxious and doesn't know what good quality education means.

Park. Park has been a teacher in South Korean public schools for ten years. She

has taught at three different schools, with the majority of her time teaching as a

homeroom teacher. Currently she is in her first year of teaching English as a second

language. Park has participated in the same PLC for the last two years. She explained that

the participation is voluntary, but mandatory. Park said, "These days the office of

education wants to make every school a PLC, so we don't have a choice. I think every

teacher has to join a PLC in my school and most other schools."

Park is in a PLC with her fellow English as a second language teachers but said

the members don't have the confidence to talk about professional topics related to

teaching or learning. Instead, they use their PLC time to focus on the behavior of students

and build better relationships with each other. She thinks that students are more creative

and confident now than in the past, and their perspective of teachers is that being a

teacher is easy. Park also explained that the parents' perspective of teachers and schools

has also changed. She explained that parents are treating teachers more like caretakers

than educators, and they view the school as more of a daycare facility. This shift in

perspective is happening at the same time that elementary schools are implementing more

progressive policies, in order to focus more on individual student learning and creativity.

A few years ago, Park participated in a teacher exchange program with the most

progressive city in terms of education in South Korea. She said that when she worked in

that province, the focus was really on the students and their learning. It wasn't just a

policy, but reality. She believes that the province she has worked in the majority of her

teaching career, focuses more on administrative work and appearances than actual

teaching. Recently, she received an award from the office of education for the quality of

work she did in her PLC. However, she said she only received it because she spent a lot

of time writing about the paperwork, not because they observed and saw the real work of

her PLC.

Moon. Moon has been a teacher in South Korean public elementary schools for

fourteen years, with experience at four different schools. She has equal experience as a

homeroom teacher and specialized English as a second language teacher from grades

three to six. Moon likes to rotate between the two positions, because although she prefers

being the English as a second language teacher, she thinks it can be a lonely job. In most

public elementary schools there are only a few specialized English as a second language

teachers, so she has limited interactions with coworkers. Moon has been participating in a

PLC for the last two years, but it is different than most PLCs in her province. The PLC

she is involved in is run by the office of education and only focuses on teaching English.

> Our PLC is a little different because it's not organized by the school, it's run by
>
> the local office of education. So, our PLC is only for English. I've heard that the
>
> other schools have a lot of PLCs in one school and their aim and their goals are
>
> different. But our PLC is only for teaching English, and all the members are
>
> English teachers.

Even though Moon's PLC is run by the office of education and not her school, her

principal still pushes all English teachers to participate. The PLC consists of English

teachers from both elementary and secondary schools, so sometimes she finds that the

material from the meetings is not useful in her classroom. Because Moon's PLC only

focuses on teaching English as a second language, she doesn't have the opportunity to work with teachers in her school regarding their specific students. She believes that student behavior is a growing concern of educators in South Korean elementary schools. Moon finds that there is no real way to reprimand students, as formal assessments have been removed and grades or report cards are not relevant.

During the in-depth interviews, the following themes emerged: 1) Officially voluntary, unofficially mandatory, 2) policy is not reality, 3) drawing the short straw for leadership, and 4) vehicle for venting. Each theme is outlined below.

Officially Voluntary, Unofficially Mandatory

All six participants expressed the same lived experience in which participation for their respective PLCs is labeled voluntary from the provincial office of education, but strongly encouraged by their principals. A strong encouragement by a principal is viewed by all participants as mandatory participation. Although their principals imply that participation is mandatory, five out of the six participants explained that is the only extent to which their principals are involved in each PLC. According to the majority of participants, the principals do not care how the PLC is operating, just that there is a PLC. Kang said, "Some teachers don't know why they should even do the PLC." She continued to explain,

> Actually, in this school, the principal made a kind of big goal for having PLCs in our school. The teachers just listen to his idea, we need to, that the big goal is about teaching and learning. We have seven PLCs in this school. Every PLC is based on the grade, and every grade's teachers have more specific ideas about teaching and learning. The principal and vice principal are actually not involved.

The lack of involvement from school leadership is experienced by the majority of participants but was explained in a matter of fact kind of way. Shin added to this sentiment by saying that her principal and vice principal do not ask about the PLC or show any interest, the teachers just do it by themselves. Although school leadership is pushing for involvement, they are not very interested in following up on the progress. In addition, Lee explained a similar experience when discussing the details of her PLC. She expressed that only the members of her PLC focus on their PLC, while the principal and vice principal are not involved. Lee said,

> They are not interested in our PLC. They don't interrupt us because we have so many things to do. But we take time and focus on our PLC and our classrooms. In other schools, maybe the principal and vice principal like the PLCs, but in my school, they are just not interested.

When exploring this experience with Park, she stated, "Actually, many teachers don't care about the principal and the principal doesn't care about the teachers." Park added, "The provincial office of education wants to make every school a PLC, so we don't have a choice." Kim echoed the ideas of Kang, Shin, Lee, and Park, but tried to justify the lack of involvement or interest of the school leaders.

> Some principals think if they talk to regular teachers directly, they are not acting like a principal. In South Korea, we have a hierarchy between age and position, so some principals don't want to talk freely or directly to teachers. Or they think, if they do, regular teachers will be afraid of them.

All participants agree that hierarchies exist in the South Korean elementary school environment, limiting most teachers from voicing concerns to school leaders about how

the PLC is being run. In fact, several participants expressed the sentiment that most teachers in their schools prefer the lack of involvement of school leaders but want more understanding of why they must participate in a PLC and how it truly benefits students.

Policy, not Reality

All participants in this study feel that the formality of their respective PLCs is just the policy of the provincial office of education. Meaning, they have to write up a formal document for their PLC, which includes a proposed budget, meeting dates, and the agenda. These documents are directly linked to the funding that the PLCs receive. Lee explained,

> The education office gives us a budget for the amount that we request, so we use that to buy coffee or pizza, and we also buy books. The provincial office of education has a budget for PLCs, because they want teachers to make many PLCs and develop the PLC culture. However, teachers think it is just work, so I think that is a very sad thing. I know there is a budget and that is a very good thing for teachers, so I always want to help the PLC.

However, there is no strict verification or follow-up regarding what the PLC is doing or how it is operating. Lee continued to explain,

> Sometimes an officer from the provincial office of education visits my school and talks about the PLC. They ask me questions because I am the leader, and I simply explain. I have to submit a report, one page for the program and one page for the budget. In our everyday school work, we always need to show the result and progress. But they know the teacher's mind, that they don't want to do the PLC

because it's extra work. That's why they give us less burden. They don't require us to show progress in our PLC, they just look and ask.

Most participants explained that what is written in the document is not always what is discussed when, or if, the PLCs meet. Kim expressed,

I just made the form, but teachers didn't want to meet. I talked with the principal and he said it is just policy, so you don't have to do it very seriously. Just make a document and don't push them. Teachers have to do more important things, so don't push them.

In addition, the participants feel confused about the purpose of a PLC, and the difference between a PLC and their weekly teacher's meetings. Kang stated, "Using the PLC is a trend, but the teachers don't know how to use or manage it. The office says it's policy, but they don't know how to use it properly." Shin commented, "PLCs have some protocols, but in South Korea we already have similar style teacher's meetings, so I think the PLC is just a regular teacher's meeting." She added, "We need more time for PLCs or observations, so we think there is a gap between reality and policy."

For Park, it seems that the appearance of an effective PLC is most important to school leadership. She explained that her principal is always trying to implement new policies and programs in order to have a good reputation, but it is only good on paper. Park said,

We do many programs, so today I went on a business trip because my school won a prize for our PLC. I had to go and take a picture, so I couldn't teach my last class. The principal cares about how we look as a school. The prize was not really

because our PLC is good, I just spent a lot of time on making the paperwork for
the PLC.

Park feels very strongly about how the PLCs are being run throughout the
province. She thinks that the concept of a PLC is important, but the formal paperwork
and pressure take away from the true purpose. She expressed,

I want to run our PLC like a platform, I don't want to make content. I just want to
give them time and opportunities, because teachers always do paperwork and it's
difficult to have time together. The official PLC has a schedule and budget, but I
think their professionality is developed when the office of education does nothing.
Just let the teachers be and don't push them. We can do anything if we have the
time. We always work, so we don't have time to talk about our classes. If the
office of education didn't request that we do a PLC or other work then teachers
would automatically, naturally make a PLC.

Drawing the Short Straw for Leadership

The majority of participants expressed that the official leader of the PLC is
responsible for all of the paperwork and organizational planning of the PLC meetings.
Because of this, it is not a position anyone wants to have. Moon explained, "It's
additional work. If you take the leadership role, you have to do something more."
According to Lee, the majority of teachers are not eager for leadership opportunities. She
states, "It's because they have so many other things they have to do and they always try
to communicate with students and parents, they have a lot of work and feel tired." This
can cause a problem when a leader needs to be chosen for the PLC. When a majority are
unwilling to take the role because it is too much extra work for them, the decision is then

a hierarchical one. Kang is the leader of her PLC and when asked how she got the role she stated, "The principal asked me. That is my duty." Kim, another PLC leader, echoed the same sentiment by stating, "That is my duty, the principal told me." Moon opened up a little bit more and said, "Honestly, the principal or supervisor chooses. In many cases, nobody wants to do it. If the principal or supervisor knows someone, they just ask them." This is the hierarchical decision-making process, which leaves some feeling frustrated. Kang states,

> I'm the leader, but I don't want to be the leader. The big plan is made by me, but specific things, I try to listen to them. But that is difficult because no one wants to tell their opinion, or everyone wants to tell their opinion. Democracy needs lots of time, but we don't have any time.

Lee is the only participant who volunteered before being mandatory selected by the principal, because no one wanted to be the leader.

> That is the Korean school system. In my PLC, I volunteered because they didn't want to do anything because it's extra work. In the South Korean school system, the person who gets the PLC work is the leader, it's usually mandatory. They say you are the leader because you have the responsibility.

Vehicle for Venting

The participants in the study have all agreed that a lack of time inhibits them from being able to fully understand what a PLC is and how it can best help their students. Each PLC must submit a formal report to the provincial office of education with exact meeting times. During these meetings, PLC members use the time in various ways. However, the overall consensus is that the majority of time is spent sharing the highs and lows of

classroom management, lesson plans, activities, or sometimes nothing even related to education. Kang explained that her PLC only has time to meet and discuss the problems or successes of what is going on in their classrooms, but not enough time to work on solutions. On the other hand, some PLCs have given up on using their time for discussing education. Lee explained, "It is very difficult for them to open their classroom, or problem, or mind. So, I try to open mine first, and I want to be a model for them about communication." This is why she uses the PLC time to build rapport with her members by having coffee or lunch together. Unfortunately, that leaves very little time to discuss any classroom issues or solutions in order to improve student achievement. She is not alone, Kim states, "I have a meeting with my PLC members, but we don't talk about the PLC because we are tired. We just stopped studying and talking about education."

There is also the factor of hierarchy when it comes to communicating within the PLC. Park explained that when she runs her PLC, she is always worried about the more senior teachers, because they dominate the discussion and rarely allow other teachers to challenge their opinions. In this way, it becomes more of a lecture or venting session for these teachers, while the other PLC members just sit and listen. Shin explained that in her PLC, in order to solve the problem that Park has experienced, they use a talking stick. They pass it around and each teacher must share something for one minute. However, when talking about her willingness to share her ideas about more senior teacher's experiences, she states, "I think if it's a negative thing, I can't say anything. But if it's positive, I can directly say it comfortably." Comfort and confidence seem to be two factors that dictate who participates in the PLC discussions and to what extent. According to Moon,

Several of them share their ideas, but a few are just listening and don't really like

to talk until you ask them directly. I think everyone wants to get something and

get the other teachers' materials, but they are really shy to open their own ideas

and classes because they don't think they are very good.

Kang believes that in order for the PLC to have a good level of comfort, they cannot have

anyone who is too "bossy." She also explained that for good communication in South

Korean culture, "The boundary between work and life is flexible. Sometimes the

members can be my coworkers, and sometimes they can be my friends." Lee explained

that in order to build confidence, her PLC members write a reflective journal about their

classroom experiences and share it during their PLC meeting time. She said that although

the problems do not get solved quickly, "before the meeting they have difficulty, but after

they feel happier or confident."

This chapter provided the findings and themes that emerged from the interviews

of the six participants in the study. The participants struggle with the purpose of a PLC

and the pressure to participate in and lead a PLC. However, they find some solidarity and

comfort in sharing their classroom experiences with their fellow teachers and building

their confidence. Chapter 5 will provide an interpretation of these findings, as well as

recommendations based on the findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The concluding chapter of this qualitative research study provides an overview of the study, as well as a discussion and implications of the themes. In order to better understand the findings and themes, the researcher uses the cultural lens of Confucianism. The researcher also explains the limitations of the study and gives recommendations to provincial offices of education, school leaders, and teachers. Finally, the researcher puts forth areas for future research based on the study's limitations and findings.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research dissertation was to investigate the lived experiences of veteran teachers participating in the PLC process in transient school environments in South Korea. PLCs in South Korean public schools have only recently emerged as a way to improve teacher quality and student learning (Lee & Kim, 2016). Lee and Kim (2016) explained that PLCs are only being implemented at the provincial level, not the national level, leaving room for misunderstanding of standards and regulations. South Korea has a long history of having a strong, centralized education system in which the Ministry of Education sets national standards and policies. However, recent educational reforms and the election of progressive provincial superintendents throughout South Korea have led to a more decentralized education system in which provincial offices of education dictate new policies and programs (Cha, 2016). As an education system that was centrally controlled and strictly focused on teacher-centered practices for so long, it is not surprising that the emergence of progressive superintendents is leading to more collaborative, student-centered policies and programs,

like PLCs. Unfortunately, teacher culture within the centralized Korean education system has been individualized (Lee, 2015), making the concept of collaboration through PLCs difficult for teachers to accept without any specific guidelines or explanations.

In order to better understand this phenomenon, the researcher used the IPA research approach to explore the lived experiences of six veteran teachers participating in PLCs at their respective schools. IPA was used because it focuses on the lived experiences of people regarding a specific event or phenomenon that they have experienced (Smith et al., 2012). The teachers who participated in this study shared their PLC experiences and reflections through two semi-structured, face-to-face interviews. The researcher analyzed the findings of this research study and found four themes. To better understand and interpret the themes, the researcher used the cultural lens of Confucianism, which is discussed below.

Cultural Lens of Confucianism

As South Korea is a nation strongly influenced by Confucianism, it is important to interpret these findings with that in mind. South Koreans are very proud of their culture and still follow tradition; while at the same time they try to implement progressive, Western educational policies or programs. At times, South Korean tradition and Western educational policies or programs contradict each other. The main reason is because Western education policies or programs are lacking the intricate values of Confucianism: *Ren* meaning benevolence, altruism, and humanity; *Yi* meaning a sense of righteousness; *Li* meaning the boundaries of proper behavior; and *Chih* meaning the ability to differentiate good from bad (Schenck & Waddey, 2017). These values of Confucianism are incorporated into every aspect of South Korean society, giving South Koreans a sense

of pride and identity (Chung, 2016). This sense of pride and identity help South Koreans live as one collective society that harmoniously exists because of the Confucius virtues. Shin (2019) found that biological intergroup hierarchy beliefs, a concept rooted in Confucianism, are strongly present within South Korean society. These beliefs guide the way groups form and make decisions for the greater good of the group. In biological intergroup hierarchy beliefs, age and position are viewed as meaningful factors when justifying social hierarchies that lead the group.

In the South Korean education setting, teachers are culturally trained to accept whatever those at the top of the hierarchy ask of them, even if it goes against their individual beliefs or wants. For the context of this research study, those at the top of the educational hierarchy include the provincial office of education and school leaders. The participants in this research study all openly expressed their individual opinions and feelings regarding all aspects of their PLC experience; however, every time they were asked if they would express these same opinions and feelings with their school leaders or officers from the provincial office of education, they all laughed and used some variation of the word "never". As the interviewer is perceived as an outsider who does not have to abide by the biological intergroup hierarchy beliefs, the participants in this study were more open and honest about their lived experiences. The four themes were (a) officially voluntary, unofficially mandatory, (b) policy, not reality, (c) drawing the short straw for leadership, and (d) vehicle for venting. In order to best interpret and understand the findings, the researcher used the cultural lens of Confucianism.

Officially voluntary, unofficially mandatory. The first theme that emerged from the research study is that all participants felt it was mandatory to join their respective

PLCs, even though the provincial office of education explicitly stated it was voluntary. When interpreting this theme with the cultural lens of Confucianism it is not surprising that the participants felt they must participate when their principals suggested it would be a good idea. South Korea is known for its strict hierarchy within its culture, society, and organizations. This strict hierarchy places importance on age and position, and leaves little to no room for opposition by those younger or in a lower position. In South Korean public schools, principals and vice principals, as well as older-aged teachers are at the top of the hierarchy. The researcher believes that the pressure the participants received to participate in PLCs is due to the underlying hierarchy within South Korean society. Although the provincial office of education claims that creating and participating in a PLC are voluntary and not required of any school or teacher, when a principal or vice principal suggests it then teachers' biological intergroup hierarchy beliefs interpret it as mandatory. Regardless of the personal beliefs of the participants, they went along with what their principals suggested because not doing so would disrupt the group harmony. Kang explained that the teachers put pressure on themselves to do what is best for the group. She said, "We have to study together, we have to work hard together. This is very important, so we have to do this PLC."

In addition, South Korea is a high context culture when it comes to intercultural communication. High context cultures use implicit, non-verbal forms of communication to interpret and understand the true meaning of what is being said or not being said (Lee et al., 2016). When the participants' principles suggested or recommended that they join a PLC, it was done using nonverbal forms of communication such as gestures, facial expressions, or tone of voice. Lee said, "My principal is like the boss in a company, she

always orders us with her eyes." Park explained that the tone of her principal is automatically viewed as an order even if it is structured as a suggestion. In this high-context intercultural communication setting, all of these nonverbal forms of communication are interpreted as a direct order. Although the participants in this study were never directly told to participate in their respective PLCs, it was understood that they must when considering their biological intergroup hierarchy beliefs and South Korea's high context intercultural communication.

Policy, not reality. Another theme that emerged is that the majority of the participants expressed concern regarding the actual implementation and purpose of the PLC. Participants overwhelmingly stated that on paper their PLCs were formal policy, but in reality, they were not given enough support or information to understand and properly implement the PLC. The participants found themselves writing up formal documents for the provincial office of education outlining their agenda and budget, but not following through with it. Park explained, as a leader of her PLC, on the formal paper she wrote that she went and observed classes and gave feedback to teachers. However, she never went, and nobody ever checked. Having over ten years of experience in South Korean education, the researcher has experienced this same situation regarding formal policy and the reality of implementing the policy. One explanation for the lack of follow-up or sincerity in educational policy is that educational policy reform in South Korea is a very common occurrence. When new presidential administrations are elected every five years, they want to create and implement their own set of educational policies. As South Korea has decentralized some aspects of education, giving provincial offices of education more autonomy, this practice has transferred to the elected superintendents of each

province. The newly elected, progressive superintendents in the provinces where the data was collected have been creating and implementing various new policies within their provinces (Cha, 2016). The participants expressed that some teachers find the creation and implementation of new policies to be fickle and trendy, as they are used to seeing new educational policies come and go as newly elected officials come into office.

In addition, some participants explained that older teachers with more conservative points of view were less likely to eagerly participate in new progressive policies, like PLCs. Because of their age and position, their influence over the groups' perception of the PLC is stronger. Park explained that most of the teachers teaching in the province know each other, because the province is not that big and most of the teachers graduated from the same National University of Education. She went into more detail saying, "Most of the older teachers have strong personalities and talk too much about their own opinions. The teachers younger than them just follow because they are so kind." Using the cultural lens of Confucianism to interpret, it is clear that the younger teachers are abiding by the biological intergroup hierarchy beliefs and when the older teachers disagree with a policy or idea, it sets the tone for the group. Choi (2017) found that when teachers in South Korea are presented with new educational policies, their own beliefs about education impact how they implement or to what extent they implement the new policy. With little to no accountability on the implementation and progress of PLCs in South Korea, the depth to which they are being used may vary greatly from one PLC to another. Because teachers in South Korea are accustomed to an ever-changing educational policy environment, and group hierarchy influences the group perception, they may perceive new trends like PLCs as just that, trends.

Furthermore, some participants expressed that their principals use PLCs as a way to show society that they are working hard for the students and creating a better educational environment. However, this is just a formality when in reality they are not following up or concerned about their school's PLCs. This is especially true when it comes to doing action research and showing results. All participants stated that they do not track student data to monitor the progress of their students based on the goal of their respective PLCs. South Korean society is highly success driven, with extreme judgment placed on failure. This pressure to always be successful has created a culture obsessed with appearances and judgment. This culture is evident in all aspects of society, even in South Korean elementary schools where principals want to be known for their school's outstanding reputation and performance. Even though the participants in the study know that it is just policy on paper and not being fully utilized in reality, they go along with their principals because of biological intergroup hierarchy beliefs. In order to appear successful, sometimes principals take on too many new projects or policies. With the lack of government follow-up of PLCs, it is the perfect opportunity for principals to implement a new policy to show society they are working hard to improve student learning without having to show any results. The researcher interprets the data to show that provincial offices of education are also using PLCs in a similar way as principals. By spending money on progressive, Western policies and programs they can show society they are making changes without providing genuine results. Kim explained that the provincial office of education encouraged the teachers in her PLC to do whatever they wanted and be creative. They never gave her PLC any guidelines or checked in on them. However, when someone at the top of the hierarchy unexpectedly asked for some results,

the provincial office of education and the principal asked the PLC members to join a

meeting and make a formal presentation. Kim said,

> They wanted us to make a presentation and they wanted us to say 'oh our school
>
> is so successful, this is a good system.' But we know there are good and bad
>
> things. The school didn't want us to talk about the bad things.

Both schools and the provincial office of education are complicit in using progressive

policies to further their own agendas. The pressure to continuously implement new

policies and appear successful to society has negatively affected the potential of PLC

implementation and participation in South Korean public schools.

Drawing the short straw for leadership. Several of the research participants

were leaders of their respective PLCs. However, they did not choose to be leaders or

show any interest in being leaders. Instead they were told by their principals they would

be leaders. In a PLC, leadership should be shared and linear, not assigned to one person

and horizontal. In South Korean PLCs, the principals or vice principals select one teacher

to be the leader of the PLC and that person is responsible for the main duties of their

PLC, regardless if they want to be the leader or not. The idea of leadership is viewed

negatively by the participants in this study because it evokes a sense of burden and extra

responsibility, not an opportunity for growth and development. Moon explained that no

one wants the role of leader, so the principal just chooses someone. She said, "We don't

have to do that role, but if we are chosen it's extra work for us." Because of the deeply

rooted hierarchical values in South Korean leadership, teachers who are assigned as PLC

leaders know they have no real power to make big changes, as the principal will

ultimately have the final say. The perception of leadership is different from a South

Korean and western point of view, based on the virtues of Confucianism. Adding to this, biological intergroup hierarchy beliefs and South Korea's high context intercultural communication can also be used to interpret the inability of teachers to say no when asked by their principals to lead their PLCs.

      Vehicle for venting. The final theme that emerged is that the participants felt the time spent with their PLC members was used to vent, not make changes. Although the participants support teacher collaboration in order to improve student learning, as well as the overall learning environment, there was a disconnect between the PLC policy and the reality of its implementation. On paper, the goals were clearly outlined, but in reality, they often used the time to discuss their own problems. Kim said, "We complained a lot and talked about our difficulties teaching students." Kang added that sometimes the PLC members would talk about problem students, and not use the time to focus on solutions or how to help the students they were discussing. The majority of participants said they used the PLC budget to go out for coffee or tea to relieve their stress, instead of using the time to discuss anything related to the PLC. The participants in this research study and the members of their respective PLCs felt that their allocated PLC time could be used in various ways, either somewhat related to the PLC or not related at all. One reason for this, is that the school leaders of the participants in this study had a more hands-off approach and were not involved in the PLC process. The lack of leadership and support from the principals affected the perceptions of the PLC participants and the effectiveness of their PLCs. The formality of the PLC was to appease their principals' expectations, but the reality was that most PLC participants were unaware of the purpose of the PLC and had limited time and resources to explore its possibilities for school change and

improving student achievement. The time the participants did have for PLCs often turned into venting sessions regarding their teaching or the students' learning, with limited time spent on solutions for improving student learning.

Recommendations

The research findings from this study were analyzed in-depth and the researcher has several recommendations that will help the provincial office of education, school leaders, and both in-service and pre-service teachers utilize PLCs in order to improve student learning and achievement. First, the researcher recommends that the provincial office of education provides more follow-up support to schools that they provide with PLC funding. At present, the office of education only requires a formal agenda and budget outline. However, without any proper follow-up or results from the PLC, it removes any accountability on the part of the PLC to perform and show student improvement. The provincial office of education is generously funding PLCs throughout the province, but they are not ensuring that their investment is producing positive gains for the students. In order to create a more accountable PLC, the researcher recommends that the provincial office of education assign a qualified officer to work directly with each PLC and help them with action research data collection and analysis.

Second, the researcher recommends that before implementing a PLC, all teachers must work together with school leaders to develop a shared mission, vision, values, and goals for the PLC. As a school, they need to put into writing these fundamental components of a PLC. Once everyone understands the purpose of the PLC, they can move forward with setting benchmarks for action research and tracking of student achievement. In addition, the qualified officer from the provincial office of education can

assist in this process. At present, PLCs in South Korean elementary schools are not being utilized in any kind of uniformed structure. Instead, they are masquerading as teacher's meetings to discuss issues related to classroom management, student learning, and curriculum design. From this, PLC participants need better direction and encouragement from school leaders to act and make changes in their classrooms in order to improve student achievement. When school leaders are directly involved in the PLC process, it improves the effectiveness of the PLC and collective responsibility for student improvement (Park et al., 2019).

Third, it is important for teachers, both pre-service and in-service to be educated in the purpose and usage of PLCs. The researcher recommends that the local office of education, along with school leaders and teachers, work together with the two National Universities of Education in the province. The National Universities of Education should offer a course on PLCs for pre-service teachers that provide fundamental knowledge of a PLC and its purpose. In addition to the course, pre-service teachers can work together with in-service teachers and school leaders to observe their PLCs. Having pre-service teachers work together with in-service teachers will allow them to understand the theory of the classroom in reality. It will also help close the gap between the in-service teachers' misunderstandings of a PLC. All elementary school teachers in the province are educated at one of the National Universities of Education, so over time all teachers will have the fundamental knowledge, as well as some practical experience of a PLC, before becoming an in-service teacher. In addition, in-service teachers can take on mentoring roles with pre-service teachers and grow as teacher leaders without the burden of paperwork.

Considerations for Future Research

After examining and analyzing the findings of this research study, the researcher has several considerations for future research. As a PLC is a Western educational concept, the researcher believes a comparative study between PLCs in the United States and PLCs in South Korea is needed. This comparative study should examine the purpose of a PLC in each country, as well as how the shared mission, vision, values, and goals are created. A comparative study will give a more in-depth understanding of the differences and similarities in the implementation of a PLC in each country, and improvements can be made.

In addition, the limited research studies available in English on South Korean PLCs mainly focus on quantitative findings of the concept of a PLC. The researcher recommends more qualitative studies be done with both school leaders and teachers. Specifically, a qualitative study with school leaders needs to be done regarding their understanding of their own role within the PLC. Furthermore, the researcher recommends that a qualitative research study be done on South Korean teachers' perceptions of leadership opportunities. Teacher leadership is a fundamental component of PLCs and their success in improving student achievement. A better understanding of how South Korean teachers perceive leadership opportunities and participate in them is needed in order to provide them with quality opportunities and improve PLCs. Finally, the researcher recommends a longitudinal study be done within the same province, as well as expanded to the other provinces and cities that implement PLCs. This will help researchers and educational professionals better understand the phenomenon of PLCs in South Korea.

Conclusion

PLCs are successful vehicles for school change. In South Korea, public elementary schools have the potential to utilize PLCs in a positive way to improve student learning and achievement. The monetary funding is abundant, but the intention and implementation need to be more clearly focused on. Educational leaders at the top of the South Korean hierarchy need to focus on the guidance, support, and follow-up they provide their teachers in order to ensure their PLCs are set up for success. When teachers are provided with all the resources and support they need, they will be able to better serve their students and improve the learning environment.

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Appendix A

Participation E-mail

Participation E-mail

Dear (Name):

My name is Katelyn Jones, a Visiting Professor at Cheongju National University of Education and doctoral candidate at Nova Southeastern University in Florida, U.S. I received your contact information from Professor Kim Yong, and I am e-mailing to inquiry your interest to participate in a qualitative research study for dissertation, *The Lived Experiences of Teachers in Professional Learning Communities in Transient School Environments*.

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to investigate the lived experiences of veteran teachers participating in the PLC process in transient school environments in South Korea, especially regarding shared leadership and communication with novice teachers in order to build a culture of learning. As you are aware, school leaders and teachers, as well as educational professionals and researchers, are struggling with the implementation and sustainability of PLCs in South Korean public schools.

As a veteran teacher, who has participated in a PLC, you are a key source of information to better understand PLCs in South Korean public elementary schools. If you participate in this study, there will be two, one-hour long interviews in English. The interviews will be scheduled at your convenience, one week apart from each other.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please provide three days and times that best suit your schedule. I will arrange my schedule to match one of these days and times. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at either 010-9904-0844 (kakao ID: kmj160) or via e-mail at katelyn.m.jones@gmail.com.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Katelyn Jones

Appendix B

Consent Form

Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled
A Phenomenological Study: Navigating PLCs in Transient School Environments

Funding Source: None.

Principal investigator   Co-investigator

Katelyn Jones, M.S.   NONE

Cheongju National University of Education

330 Cheongnam-ro, Sugok-dong, Heungduk-gu

Cheongju, South Korea 361-712

+82 (010) 9904-0844

Site Information – Not Applicable

What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study. The goal of this study is to understand the lived experiences of veteran teachers working in PLCs in transient school environments in South Korea. Further research is needed to understand how to establish and maintain PLCs in this specific type of school environment.

Why are you asking me?

I am inviting you to participate because you meet the participant criteria set forth below: (a) the participant must be a South Korean native, (b) the participant must be a veteran teacher, (c) the participant must have experience participating in a PLC, and (d) the participant must be willing to engage in English in-depth interviews.

What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?

You will be interviewed by the researcher, Ms. Jones. Ms. Jones will set up a series of two, 60 minute interviews with you over a two week course. The interviews will explore your lived experience of PLCs in transient school environments.

Is there any audio or video recording?

This research project will include audio recordings of the interviews. These audio recordings will be available to be heard by the researcher, Ms. Katelyn Jones and the dissertation chair, Dr. Charlene Desir. The recording will be transcribed by Ms. Katelyn Jones. Ms. Jones will use earphones while transcribing the interviews to guard your privacy. The recordings will be kept securely in Ms. Jones's office computer in a locked file. The recordings will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study. The recordings will be destroyed after that time by permanently deleting them. Because your voice will

be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recordings, your confidentiality for things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the recordings as described in this paragraph.

What are the dangers to me?

Risks to you are minimal, meaning they are not thought to be greater than other risks you experience every day. Being recorded means that confidentiality cannot be promised. If you have questions about the research, your research rights, or if you experience any problems because of the research please contact Ms. Jones at (010) 9904-0844.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

There are no benefits to you for participating.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

How will you keep my information private?

The transcripts of the tapes will not have any information that could be linked to you. As mentioned, the recordings will be destroyed 36 months after the study ends. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study? You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to participate, you will not experience any penalty or loss of services you have a right to receive. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

Other Considerations:

If the researcher learns anything which might change your mind about you being involved, you will be told of this information.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document, or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researcher any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related problem
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled *Lived Experiences of Teachers in Professional Learning Communities in Transient School Environments.*

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Demographic

1. How long have you been a teacher in South Korean public schools?

2. What grades and specific subjects have you taught?

3. How many years have you participated in PLCs?

4. Has your PLC participation been mandatory or voluntary?

South Korean Schools

1. How would you describe the academics in South Korean elementary schools?

2. How would you describe relationships in South Korean elementary schools? More specifically:

    A.   What are teacher-principal/vice-principal relationships like?

    B.   What are teacher-teacher relationships like?

    C.   What are teacher-student relationships like?

    D.   What are teacher-parent relationships like?

3. How many different schools have you taught at?

4. How were they similar? How were they different?

5. What are some current educational issues happening in South Korean elementary schools now?

PLC

1. In your experience, what is a PLC?

    Six Fundamental Components of a PLC

    Shared mission, vision, values, and goals

    1. How did your PLC develop a shared mission, vision, values, and goals?

    2. What do the shared mission, vision, values, and goals focus on?

    3. Are decisions made based on the shared mission, vision, values, and goals?

    Collective inquiry

    1. How do PLC members work together to improve student learning?

    2. How does the PLC solve problems regarding student learning?

3. What professional development is given to help improve teaching and student learning?

Collaborative teams

1. Do you and members of your PLC openly share ideas on how to improve teaching practices and activities to improve student learning?

2. How often do you give feedback to members of your PLC? How often to you receive feedback from members of your PLC?

3. Is collaboration encouraged within your PLC?

Action orientation and experimentation

1. What kind of action research is done within your PLC?

2. Is action research encouraged and supported by members of the PLC, as well as the school administration?

3. How does your PLC perceive failed action research experiments?

Continuous improvement

1. How does your PLC work to continuously improve student learning?

2. How does your PLC assess improvement efforts?

Results orientation

1. How much emphasis is placed on results rather than intentions?

2. How has your PLC used results to improve student learning?

Shared Leadership

1. How would you describe leadership within your PLC?

2. What important decisions has your PLC made? How have these decisions been made?

3. Do members of your PLC work together with your school leaders to make important decisions related to school change?

4. What leadership opportunities are provided through your PLC?

Communication

1. How would you describe communication within your PLC?

2. What factors are important for successful communication within your PLC?

3. What would you do to improve communication within your PLC?

Reflection

1. How would you reflect on your experiences in your PLC regarding:

    A.   Shared mission, vision, values, and goals

    B.   Collective inquiry

    C.   Collaborative teams

    D.   Action orientation and experimentation

    E.   Continuous improvement

    F.   Results orientation

    G.   Shared Leadership

    H.   Communication