

## **REVIEWS OF POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH**

# **Promoting Teachers' Citizenship by Participation in PLC**

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### **Teacher as an Agency of Educational Practice**

Among the many factors that play a role in improving the quality of education, the quality of teachers is crucial. It is because teacher instruction is the key to improving the quality of education. Therefore, it is only natural that the strengthening of teacher capacity and professionalism are indispensable to educational reform (Cooper et al., 2011). In addition, recent discourse on education places prominent emphasis on seeing teachers as the leading actors of education improvement and change. As actors who practice educational activities, the role of teachers is increasingly viewed as proactive reconstructors of knowledge instead of passive communicators of a given content (Seo, 2016). Therefore, the importance of teachers' empowerment is growing, of which there are two main methods to be considered.

The first method of teacher empowerment is to increase teachers' capacity, which traditionally includes supervision and teacher training activities conducted by each provincial education office or individual school. However, in response to the criticism that these activities take place merely as administrative formalities, recent approaches to teacher training vary in methods that include consulting lessons, action research, mentoring, and the involvement of teachers' communities (Kim, 2010, pp. 31-32).

The second method is to improve the culture of teaching in schools. Lortie (1975) regarded the individualistic characteristics of teaching as an endemic teaching culture and thought that it undermined the collaborative culture of the school. As a solution, teachers' learning communities have been proposed in many countries, including the United States, and an interest in teacher learning communities is increasing in Korea. Although the term Professional Learning Community (hereafter PLC) may not have been used to denote the growing cooperative research and professional development activities of teacher groups, activities pertinent to PLC such as the organization of teacher research groups, teacher clubs, teacher' subject research council, and curriculum education research groups have steadily taken place. In keeping with the increasing trend of international studies about such organic teacher learning communities, studies have steadily emerged in Korea that these learning communities are useful in professional development and that positive effects on education are found when teachers work together to reduce individualism (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Hughes & Kritsonis, 2006; Seo, 2015).

Such teacher-driven PLCs promote the following three characteristics; a) the collective expertise of teachers through horizontal collaboration among teachers, b) learning groups that emphasize reflective practice over technical rationality, and c) shared values and collaborative creativity (Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education, 2019).

In addition to the promotion of such characteristics, the construction and operation of PLCs are

democratic in that groups of teachers voluntarily participate in the horizontal collaboration. Thus, PLCs cannot only promote teachers' democratic citizenship fostered within the community of teachers but as a result, they will also have a positive effect on developing democratic competencies of students.

This article will introduce Korea's PLC policy and examine the possible measures to expand teachers' democratic citizenship through PLC participation. Moreover, a case examination of teachers' participation in PLC being linked to classrooms will be conducted to consider the future direction of PLCs.

### **PLC Policy in Korea**

In Korea, PLC is emerging as a new approach that emphasizes cooperation, focusing on teachers as experts, away from the traditional top-down supervising approach. Until recently, teachers have formed organic meetings, both formal and informal, within and outside of school. In recent years, teacher meetings and organizations have started to be actively promoted on the policy level and in each provincial office of education in conjunction with the Innovation School initiative (Jung & Lee, 2017). Such policy aggressiveness may contribute to the spread and institutionalization of the learning community. However, there are also concerns that coercion can lead to side effects and confusion if pushed without a full understanding of its concept, meaning, and practice (Talbert, 2010).

PLCs in Korea use different terminology depending on the province, but they generally use terms such as teacher learning community or professional teacher learning community. There are three types of teacher communities: in-school PLCs / inter-school PLCs / PLCs outside of school. In-school PLC is a school-based teachers' professional learning community that focuses on grades, subjects, and topics that sometimes include resolving issues related to schools. Inter-school PLCs are groups where teachers from different schools gather and learn. They now see increasing policy support from each respective education office for a broader scope of teacher community activities. PLCs outside of schools comprise groups in which residents and citizens within each school district participate to promote school-related activities, which may take on various forms of organizations.

Among the three different types of PLCs, in-school PLCs are organized by theme and grade and can be composed of two or more people while at the same time schools hosting the PLCs can receive an operating budget. That makes it easy for teachers to access such communities and is suitable for improving the school culture intended by the PLC. Each education office supports the operation of in-school PLCs. Most municipal and provincial offices provide venues for in-school PLC promotion by regularly hosting Teacher Learning Community Day events. In support of such PLCs, Gyeonggido Office of Education has implemented a credit recognition system. Furthermore, the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education has started to recognize teachers' participation in PLCs that meet specific requirements as part of their mandatory teacher training program. By creatively guaranteeing the autonomy of teachers in PLCs, these methods are well received by the majority of teachers involved. The Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education shares the theme and employment plan of in-school PLCs with the School Innovation Center<sup>1</sup>. In 2019, more than 435 elementary and 530 secondary cases were posted. Although the proper balance between top-down administration and grassroots gathering is not easy, the policy of attracting PLCs in various ways seems to be taking place in Korea.

Teachers, of course, are always striving for their development and can develop their capacity through

these personal efforts. Nonetheless, it is necessary to make efforts to understand the various situations of students and schools, and to strive to approach problems at hand through various viewpoints. If we create a school culture wherein teachers from different schools may collaborate through PLCs, it will be easier to lend ourselves to the betterment of education.

### **Teachers' Ability to Practice Citizenship Education**

The aim of citizenship in social studies refers to the qualities and conditions of citizens and, therefore, the relational capabilities required by particular communities rather than individual characteristics or traits. Therefore, the required citizenship changes as society changes. As they represent autonomous collaboration among members, PLCs carry the essential characteristics of citizenship and civic competence by nature. Through PLCs, teachers can directly experience citizenship and reinforce their competencies to incorporate their values in the regular curriculum more effectively.

In modern pluralistic democratic societies where an amalgam of different values and interests collide with one another, advanced citizenship is required to view a problem from different points of view and adjust it reasonably (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). Educating such advanced citizenship requires group activities that are different from the teacher's efforts, as the ability to see a problem from a "diverse point of view" is nurtured through opportunities to communicate and coordinate with different people.

This study considers the citizenship as a quality that teachers should possess, which is divided into competency and capability. Competency is a concept presented in the OECD's Definition and Selection of Key competences (DeSeCo) project, and is defined as the ability to respond to complex needs in a specific situation successfully and includes social and behavioral factors such as knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Rychen, 2003, p. 3). In contrast, capability is a concept claimed by Sen (2000) and Nussbaum (2011) that constitutes the quality of a person's life. Sen argues that capability is the substantial freedom to choose the life we value (Sen, 2000, p. 74)<sup>2</sup>.

The difference between the two concepts is that if the competency is based on economic utilitarian Bentham and Mill, the capability values the concept of freedom based on Kant and Rawls's theory. Ko (2017) argues that if competency is an attempt at a functional approach in terms of emphasizing means to meet external demands, capability is a normative approach in terms of emphasizing what humans be and can do for human dignity and a decent life. Also, while the competency concerns an instrumental human being adapting in a "well-functioning society", capability is interested in becoming a human being in freedom. In other words, if the competency of the OECD is the ability to learn "what society is," capability means to be the ability to answer "what society should be" (Lozano, Boni, Peris, & Hueso, 2012, pp. 138-140)

When this concept is linked to the ability of citizenship required of teachers, competency from a functional point of view means the ability of teachers to help students learn the skills required by modern society. In today's society shaped by the fourth industrial revolution, teachers must be able to restructure existing curriculum-based curricula and possess effective collaboration skills (Lim, Ryu, & Kim, 2017). Jung, Nam, and Kwon (2014), who studied the experiences of teachers who participated in "social studies PLC," argued that teachers' experiences of participating in PLCs promoted their teaching ability through participation and execution, and expanded knowledge and thinking through dialogue and contact.

Capability emphasizes that the democratic meaning of education should make the process of education, not just a contest of finding competent people, but as a basis for all members of society to enjoy their dignity equally. It means that the value of society's potential should be "inclusive" in principle to all members of society, while all the different situations and individuals' diversity must be fully respected (Jang, 2017, p. 115). However, developing the full potential of all members is no different from cultivating capabilities and qualities as a democratic citizen. Democracy must be understood not as a connection to the political dimension, but as a common lifestyle of people who, above all, have the idea of guaranteeing equal human dignity to ensure that everyone can realize their human potential (Dewey, 1916). This idea is linked to the concept of the capability to approach democracy's citizenship from the foundation of human life. This distinction between competency and capability is for a more detailed understanding of citizenship, and both are teachers' qualities needed for citizenship education.

It has been pointed out that Korean morals and social studies textbooks leave many traces of totalitarianism, such as emphasizing the group's one-sided superiority over individuals rather than the proper qualities of democratic citizens (Kang, Yang, Yoo, Park, & Bae, 2011). However, it is essential for democracy that members have democratic citizenship (Gutmann, 1987, p. 39). For the internalization of democratic values beyond the level of knowledge and daily democracy, teachers need to be able to practice democratic thinking, practice, and competence in life.

If we view teaching behavior as cultural, teachers can grow and learn by observing the teaching behavior of other teachers in the teacher culture. Sharing knowledge within the community becomes a context of justification that allows knowledge to be defined on a more public and social basis beyond just individual dimensions (Kwak, 2014). The argument that the role of the teacher should be a facilitator and agents of change of learning, not just the implementation of the curriculum or the transfer of knowledge (Fullan, 1993), also supports this.

### **Reinforcement of Teacher's Citizenship Through the Case of PLC Operation**

Thematically, PLCs can be composed of curriculum-based, grade-oriented, and subject-oriented groups. Since the PLC activity itself is based on the autonomy of teachers, it can be used as a way for teachers to acquire democratic citizens' competences and qualities. Because PLC is connected to citizenship, it can play a significant role in improving teaching and learning methods of social studies centered on civic education and the empowerment of teachers.

### **Case of Subject and Grade-oriented PLC**

Maxim (2006, p. 36) argues that social studies can lead a holistic program that encompasses a variety of subjects and that teachers can not only use their time efficiently but also create interesting and challenging learning opportunities. Jang (2017, p. 206) also argues that it is crucial to attempt to approach democratic citizenship education beyond subject-specific approaches. Breaking the barriers between possible subjects and restructuring the curriculum to approach them from an integrated point of view is that democratic citizenship education can be effectively implemented through team teaching based on teacher collaboration, or by dealing with common subjects among various subjects.

In this regard, the case of Cheonwang elementary school (2019) is one of the most successful PLC examples of integrated programs practiced in schools. Eight classes of sixth-graders in Cheonwang elementary school organized a PLC and restructured the curriculum focusing on social studies. Upon selecting a theme to integrate for the restructuring of curriculum, main activities of the school's PLC was conducted in steps of <Gathering ideas about the contents of the lesson> → <Associating ideas with the curriculum> → <Creating a lesson plan for each subtopic> → <Writing a detailed lesson plan> → <Evaluation after execution>.

First of all, the subjects for integration were selected by reconstructing the contents of the national curriculum under the endemic situation of the school (in Korea, the main achievement criteria of the national curriculum are selected for each grade group, and textbooks are composed based on this). The current curriculum and textbooks distinguish lesson units for history, politics, economics, general social studies, and geography. Cheonwang elementary school's PLC constructed an integrated theme and operated a reconstructed curriculum by linking it with not only social studies topics but also achievement standards of other subjects.

As shown in table 1, the first topic – Politics & History – integrated a politics unit of social studies called life and democracy with a history unit about later Joseon Dynasty into a comprehensive lesson title as <Kings

Table 1. Cheonwang elementary school's 6<sup>th</sup> grade PLC activity

Time	Topic of social studies curriculum	Lesson activity	Achievement standards linked to other subjects
1 <sup>st</sup> week of April – 2 <sup>nd</sup> week of June	(1)<Politics & History> <i>Kings and presidents of Korea</i>	1. Finding out the meaning of democracy 2. Discussing the prerequisites of politicians and understanding the meaning and importance of elections 3. Learning about the qualities and responsibilities of a king 4. Learning about the lives and works of various kings in the late Joseon Dynasty 5. Field trip to Suwon Hwaseong fortress	· Korean : the validity of the claim and the appropriateness of expression · Ethics : understanding of the meaning of fairness and the importance of living just.
3 <sup>rd</sup> week of September -1 <sup>st</sup> week of December	(2)<Geography & Global Society> <i>Into the global world</i>	1. Learning about the geography and features of the six continents 2. Discussing the issues of Dokdo island and reunification of the two Koreas 3. Global issues and efforts to resolve them: human rights and peace	Korean: using listening and speaking media materials to effectively deliver presentations Art: elaborating ideas and expressions about visual characteristics shown in architecture Ethics: fostering an attitude toward respect and humanitarianism

Note: This is a reconstruction of some of the activities of Cheonwang Elementary School.

and Presidents of Korea>. During this activity, the qualifications and roles of kings were compared to those of modern presidents to help the students understand the conceptions of monarchy and democracy. For a new set of achievement standards for this course, the achievement standard of Korean – evaluating the validity of the claim and appropriateness of expression – was applied in evaluating the students' level of understanding of arguments and pledges made by politicians in a democratic society. Conceptions of fairness and justice taught in ethics were introduced to help the students understand democratic decision-making processes.

Next, into the global world applied conceptions related to an architecture based on the theme of environment and architecture taught in art lessons to enable students to understand the global community's geographical context better. Additionally, themes of human rights and peace were dealt with in conjunction with geography lessons within the context of humanitarianism in the global community. In preparing the two-part integrated curriculum implementation, all homeroom teachers of the participating eight classes of the 6th grade worked together to elect the thematic principles, restructured the content through ongoing discussions, and shared roles in preparing the materials and content for each activity. For example, the location and characteristics of the six continents of the world, which are geographical aspects, were classified and conducted through data development and textbook research. Also, in the second section, human rights issues on a) Japanese comfort women and human rights (Teacher A and B); b) Labor rights (Teacher D and H); c) Refugee issues (Teacher C and G); and d) Rights and obligations according to the constitution (Teacher E and F) were elected and developed in groups.

As such, there have been many cases where the same school year runs a curriculum together. There is a great deal of discussion, decision-making, and collaboration as teachers collaborate, helping teachers improve their school culture and citizenship skills to solve problems with other teachers. Cheonwang elementary school as Korean Innovative School guarantees autonomy for teachers to reorganize classes and reflect them freely and creates a school atmosphere in which to realize them. In order to create an educational environment suitable for each school's situation, it is possible to structure the entire school democratically in terms of capability and try to establish a democratic culture in the relationship between teachers.

### **Case of Theme-based PLC<sup>3</sup>**

With the change of society, global citizenship is emphasized as an essential capability that modern society demands and education to cultivate has recently been spotlighted (Park, 2018). Seoul Soongshin elementary school operated a PLC about global citizenship education (GCED) and recruited teachers interested in the subject for autonomous participation. Five teachers of grades 1, 4, and 5, including a researcher, participated in the PLC "GCED in the classroom." This community shared interests in the topic and held regular meetings every two weeks to continue learning and discussing matters relevant to GCED in a variety of ways. However, since new studies and researches about global citizenship have indicated new conceptions of global citizenship, it was proven difficult to form a sufficient theoretical foundation by teachers alone. Therefore, efforts were made by the participating teachers through collaborative research with the Research Center for Global Studies Education (RCGE) in order to overcome the limitations of the community of teachers, of which the resulting PLC activities to refine lessons were conducted as follows:

<Selection of lesson objectives and core activities: 1st lesson plan> → <2nd lesson plan reflecting

professional institution consulting> → <3rd lesson plan through learning community discussion> → <reflection after actual lesson>

Consultation with educational research institutes examined aspects of lesson content, such as the relevance of activities to lesson objectives and the accurate understanding of concepts. Furthermore, potential issues that may arise during the execution of lessons such as adequacy of learning content for students, the specificity of activities, student interest, and timeliness of lesson plans were examined and refined through discussions among participating teachers. It is part of the PLC out-of-school PLC. It is a practical example to explore the possibility of not only teachers but also education officials and experts in specific fields to collaborate.

The following interview response provides a better understanding of the preparation processes for the PLC seen from a teacher's perspective.

*Teacher K: In my preparation for covering gender equality. I had viewed gender discrimination as a mere phenomenon of social change. However, upon my consultation with the involved research institute, I realized that awareness for gender education could be taught seamlessly in conjunction with eliminating discrimination through human rights education or teaching awareness for equality.*

*In discussions with teachers, I added a checklist to self-check how much children are conscious of the conceptions of gender equality. I proposed that they employ examples of gender discrimination from fairy tales as well as individual, real-life experiences to teach gender equality.*

*At first, the meetings felt burdensome, and I was shy to present my opinion and ideas about the class, but I was soon reassured by many valuable inputs from group members to prepare my class better. I was also surprised by the fact that I was able to collaborate with external institutions and experts in the field, including professors I thought would be difficult to seek advice from.*

As shown above, teacher K has developed PLC activities and collaborated with external institutions to develop a broader range of thinking and collaboration skills than what would have been challenging to nurture within a typical school environment. This case demonstrates the very plausible potential of in-school PLCs transforming into out-of-school PLCs by collaborating with external agencies.

Although this case is closely related to the functional demand of competency, in order for collaboration to be positive, the teacher's voluntary motivation, satisfaction in human life, self-esteem as a teacher, and conditions for unfolding teachers' abilities are also important requirements. PLC has a positive impact on teachers' satisfaction with their own life through the group's efforts and establishing a more desirable direction and philosophy of education.

Democracy is not just given but should be formed in solidarity with people who respect and recognize equal dignity (Jang, 2017). The experience of respecting and recognizing each other among teachers or social communities and sharing the direction and values of education through collaboration will have a positive impact on teachers' internalizing this democratic citizenship. In particular, this example demonstrates how teachers' communities can connect with communities outside the school to share their expertise and collaborate. While it is relatively challenging for individual teachers to collaborate with external organizations, PLC makes this more proactive.

## **The Balance Between Top-down and Bottom-up Approach Toward PLC Effectiveness**

The researcher participated in the 'Training for Teachers for PLC Settlement,' which lasted for one year, and shared the teacher's thoughts and comparisons of cases of PLCs in schools in Seoul. Moreover, it was revealed that policy measures to expand the teachers' autonomy, such as recognizing PLC participation as compulsory teacher training has received positive feedback from teachers. Teachers buy and share instructional materials with the school's PLC budget, and feel that the learning of senior teachers' experience through community activities is of great value. Practical knowledge of teachers is as good as that of any instructor, and PLCs can be a system for fostering competent teachers and instructors.

This training course provided an opportunity to share cases of PLCs operated by each school and to share the concerns about PLCs as an intermediary leader. Although PLCs are operated based on the cooperation of teachers, coordination is, in most cases, time consuming and physical separation of schools and venues pose difficulties in consolidating a cooperative community. Also, the trainees agreed that a consensus of each PLC's purpose and its intention was needed to enable the participants of a PLC a real sense of autonomy, instead of having them feel obliged to participate. Therefore, opinions were gathered on the importance of inducing teachers' voluntary participation and securing regular time and space by reflecting on the topics and activities according to the needs of the school.

In Korea, PLC policy is linked to "the innovative school system" that wants to change the school culture and "the system of school education support team" that allows teachers to focus more on their classes than on administrative tasks. Recently, progressive superintendents in Korea have been actively seeking various ways for teachers to concentrate on their classes in the school, which is one of the underlying contexts of PLC vitalization in Korea. Therefore, PLC is characterized as a method to establish a normative school culture and teacher cooperation systems in Korea. The question of how to ensure efficient operation of such PLCs is what should be focused on from now on.

Features such as cooperativeness, community, and horizontal creativity that PLCs have are linked to the capacity of citizens that social education crucially demands. This capacity can create positive effects by practicing reflective class sharing through the form of PLCs. Teachers' learning communities, which appear in various forms in many countries around the world, are generally regarded as a positive system and phenomena. The recent emphasis on PLCs in Korea should be interpreted as the increasing necessity for PLCs in improving Korea's teaching culture. Teachers are not only the subjects of education to cultivate students' citizenship, but they are also citizens who must possess qualities and abilities. Teachers may not become a passive being only if they have the opportunity to participate in forming the social conditions of their life as a teacher.

Such findings indicate that merely by participating in PLC activities, teachers are allowed to collectively explore ways to thematically approach the teaching of social studies subjects based on citizenship, and share and coordinate their approaches to social issues as well as teaching methods. In addition, in terms of citizenship, it is possible to accept the necessity for an individual to think and act introspectively, beyond the ordinary knowledge education, that is, reflexiveness as the basis of democratic education. It is also expected that teachers who experience the grassroots teacher learning community will be active in educating students with democratic civic capacities.

## Notes

1. <http://innoschoolcenter.sen.go.kr>
2. Both competencies and capabilities were used in plural forms originally suggested by OECD and Nussbaum respectively. However, since this article only considers the domain related to citizenship, it is used in singular form.
3. For more detail about the case, see Park (2018).

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