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PRELIMINARY STUDY ON ADMINISTRATIVE MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY TO DEVELOP THAI LANGUAGE TEACHING CAPACITY OF PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN THREE SOUTHERN BORDER PROVINCES

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Abstract

The three southern border provinces of Thailand are unique with their own language and cultural identity. Most students speak Thai as a second language. Such conditions, educators

put their effort seeking appropriate methods of teaching Thai language to the context of those areas. This research aims to develop the administrative model of professional learning communities to improve teaching skills of elementary school teachers in the three southern border provinces. The study was guided by two main questions: (1) what are the components of the PLC administrative model?; and (2) how should the model be developed in improving Thai teachers' teaching ability? A mixed-methods approach was employed, which consists of document analyses to identify the elements of the PLC administrative model, and then to synthesize the preliminary model. After that the researcher examined the suitability and feasibility of the model by using in-depth interviews with 17 key informants; focus group with 20 experts; and questionnaires with 705 school administrators and Thai language teachers from elementary schools in those three southern border provinces. Research data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and content analysis. The preliminary results revealed that the PLC administrative model for the development of Thai language teachers' teaching skills in those areas should comprise four main stages: (1) planning for establishing the objectives of a collaborative team and guidelines for action; (2) implementing the action plan into classroom practices along with teachers' shared learning and experiences, (3) investigating the performances of teachers by using methods of supervision, monitoring, and evaluation, and 4) rectifying all practices to improve the model for the sustainable development of Thai language teachers in the three southern border provinces. The results suggest that each stage of the effective model should be interrelated to the PLC principle. For better conclusion, the model is further experimented within two participative schools.

Keywords

Professional Learning Community, Thai Language, Teaching Capacity, Southern Border Province

1. Introduction

The operation of educational management in three southern border provinces (Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat) of Thailand must be consistent with social conditions, culture and local needs, which are different from those in other areas as there is more religious and cultural diversity than other areas nearby, that is, 80 percent of Muslim in Thailand are living in these three provinces. As a result, the educational management in these provinces not only serve educational opportunities and build up educational quality, but also serve Islamic needs of Thai Muslim people, the majority of people in the area. Moreover, the educational

operation must be taken place among insurrection problems causing both direct and indirect effects on educational management (Panich, 2012).

The quality of educational management in three southern border provinces has faced with a lot of problems such as cultural differences, problems as a result of insurrection. The problems directly affect educational management quality in general and also quality of students, especially literacy. The results of national reading test conducted by Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC) obviously reflect the weaknesses of students' reading ability. It categorized the students' reading ability into four levels: Good, Fair, Need Improvement and Inability. The results also show that most illiterate students are found in three southern border provinces, in which there are 875 schools in 9 primary educational areas. The three southern border provinces have their own special language and cultural identity, and 86 percent of people there are Muslim who use Thai as a second language for communication. The students usually start using Thai for communication in kindergarten year 1, so they have faced with problems of using Thai in their daily communication (Office of Basic Education Commission, OBEC, 2013).

According to the literature review towards factors influencing Thai language use of students in three southern border provinces found that there is both personal and family factors influence on these students' use of Thai language. Personal factors particularly affect their grade results, attitude towards learning Thai language and reading habit. However, teacher is another important factor since he brings curriculum to real practice in the classroom and manage learning activities. His teaching effectiveness depends on his knowledge, ability, experience and teaching methodology. It is certainly true that skillful teacher can attract students' interest and effectively support students' learning (Barber, 2007; Panich, 2012).

Moreover, every school in three southern border provinces has also faced with the lack of skillful Thai teachers both in terms of quantity and quality. In terms of quantity, the number of Thai teachers who are Thai-major graduates is not adequate; therefore, most Thai teachers are non-Thai major teachers who are not expert in Thai language. This causes quality problems since the non-Thai major teachers do not have potential in what they are teaching even knowledge or understanding towards curriculum and teaching methodology. It causes the low level of educational quality of students in three southern border provinces, that is, it is lower than the quality of students in other parts of the country. Problem solutions the related organizations use are: training sessions focusing on original teaching techniques rather than practice, field trips, etc. However, these solutions have not still been the answers

for problem questions. The researcher therefore thinks that there should be a professional development model to develop Thai teachers' teaching potential that conforms to identity of people in this area, in which Thai is used as a second language, and use Thai teachers' power in the area to solve problems (Hord, 2003).

According to the previous research findings, to achieve the potential development of students, the teachers must be encouraged to have needs and enthusiasm for professional development and be willing to participate in teacher development activities. School administrators and colleagues must help encourage them to have power of strength, intelligence and practice so that they will have needs of self-development to be able to manage their students' learning, make learning network for academic cooperation, collaboratively create learning management visions and team working culture, including exchange and share working experience and help each other develop students' quality. In addition, the encouragement of teachers' potential development through teacher networks and collaboration enables the teachers to have better potential and realize what the students' needs are (DuFour, 2004). The aforementioned is consistent with the concepts of Professional Learning Community (PLC) widely presented at both national and international levels (DuFour, R., & Eaker, R., 1998; Hord, 2003; Wenger & Synder, 2000; Waters, McNulty & Marzano, 2005; Panich, 2012).

PLC is a development model to develop teachers to be a personal mastery. The concepts of PLC are applied following the concepts of Learning Organization. The development of teacher based on PLC has been widely spread in Canada, the USA and other European countries. It aims at developing national educational quality with crucial professional development strategies: creating learning culture among teachers working together, setting developmental goals, focusing on learners' learning, and working collaboratively. As a result, PLC is a tool of practical teachers to change their instructional management, not only waiting for the administrators' instructions. It can be concluded that the PLC is a tool relieving the teachers from power relations to horizontal relationship in making educational change collaboratively. It also helps building up strong groups of teacher to create exchange and share experience in order to create new knowledge or improve the knowledge from daily instruction (Hord, 2007). This is confirmed by the research findings of Fullan (2005) stating that the schools developed by PLC model positively change their teachers' professional quality, support shared leadership, collaborative working and learning in development of learning management and obviously increase learning outcome (Marzano, 2005).

The main goal of Thai educational development is human being development based on the National Education Act B.E. 2542 (1999). However, the original operation that is separately operated and emphasizes instructional content rather than learning is not certainly able to achieve the goal (Ministry of Education, 2010), especially in 21st century era, the era of modern technological change, transfer and link (Panich, 2011; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). It is clearly presented that many countries are active to propel educational management to serve the changes in the 21st century; for example, Japan emphasizes teacher development focusing on lesson study, Finland focuses on teachers' problem solving groups, Shanghai China develops their teachers by lesson group and research group models, and Singapore uses PLC concepts to reform learning through the conceptual framework, "Teach less, Learn more," etc. It is clear that many countries emphasize learning management through PLC concepts for collaborative cooperation based on real practice. In Thailand, however, a few schools have attempted to apply the PLC concepts to propel learning to practice in the classroom as the concepts PLC are likely good options for effective teacher development to improve students' learning quality in the schools (DuFour, 2004).

The researcher as school administrator working in the three southern border province is thus interested in applying the PLC concepts to develop Thai teachers' learning management ability to answer two research questions: 1) what are the PLC administrative model's components?; and 2) how should the model be developed in improving Thai teachers' teaching ability?. The findings of this research study will enable school administrators and teachers to have the ways to effectively develop Thai teachers' instructional behaviors so that students' Thai language ability will probably be improved based on curriculum standards, and the teacher will be able to pursuit more knowledge and sustainable self-development.

2. Objectives of the Study

-To investigate the components of PLC administrative model in developing Thai teachers' instructional ability at primary schools of Primary Educational Areas in three southern border provinces.

-To develop a PLC administrative model in improving Thai teachers' instructional ability at primary schools of Primary Educational Areas in three southern border provinces.

3. Methodology

To basically present how PLC model is developed to improve Thai teachers' instructional ability at primary schools of Primary Educational Areas in three southern border provinces, the researcher divides the operation into three stages: 1) synthesizing components and characteristics of PLC (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1997,1998, 2007; Wenger & Snyder, 2000; Waters, McNulty & Marzano, 2005; Panich, 2012) with a plan–do–check–adjust (PDCA) process (Deming, 1986; Sallis, 1993; Lewis & Smith, 1994) by reviewing literature and related research to draft a model, 2) checking appropriateness and possibility of the drafted model by interviewing 17 educational administrators, school administrators, teachers and educational supervisors and developing the first model, and 3) checking appropriateness and possibility of the first model through two methods: group discussion of 20 educational administrators, school administrators, teachers and educational supervisors and interview of 750 samples of school administrators and Thai teachers in Grade 3 and Grade 6 at primary schools in three southern border provinces and developing the second model. The research instruments are document recording forms, in-depth interview questions, focus group discussion topics, and questionnaires. The statistical data used for data analysis is Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Standard Deviation and content analysis.

As for the process of the model's effectiveness evaluation, four important indicators will be further examined: 1) teachers' Thai instructional ability, 2) satisfaction of teachers, 3) satisfaction of students, and 4) sustainability of the model use. To confirm usefulness, possibility, appropriateness and correctness of the model, the researcher has been conducting an experiment in two sampled schools that is not presented in this article.

4. Research Findings

According to the synthesis of related literature and research, including examination of appropriateness and possibility of the model through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion, the researcher found that the PLC administrative model in developing Thai teachers' instructional ability was developed based on two main related components: 1) PLC concepts or principles: shared value and vision, learning teamwork, collaborative learning and application, shared practical methods, determination towards continuous improvement and conditions of support and making relationship, 2) PLC administrative process by the use of PDCA of Deming having 4 stages: planning, doing, checking and adjusting, which will

possibly be effective in 3 components – Thai teachers’ instructional ability, teachers’ satisfaction towards PLC model and students’ satisfaction towards Thai teachers’ teaching as shown below:

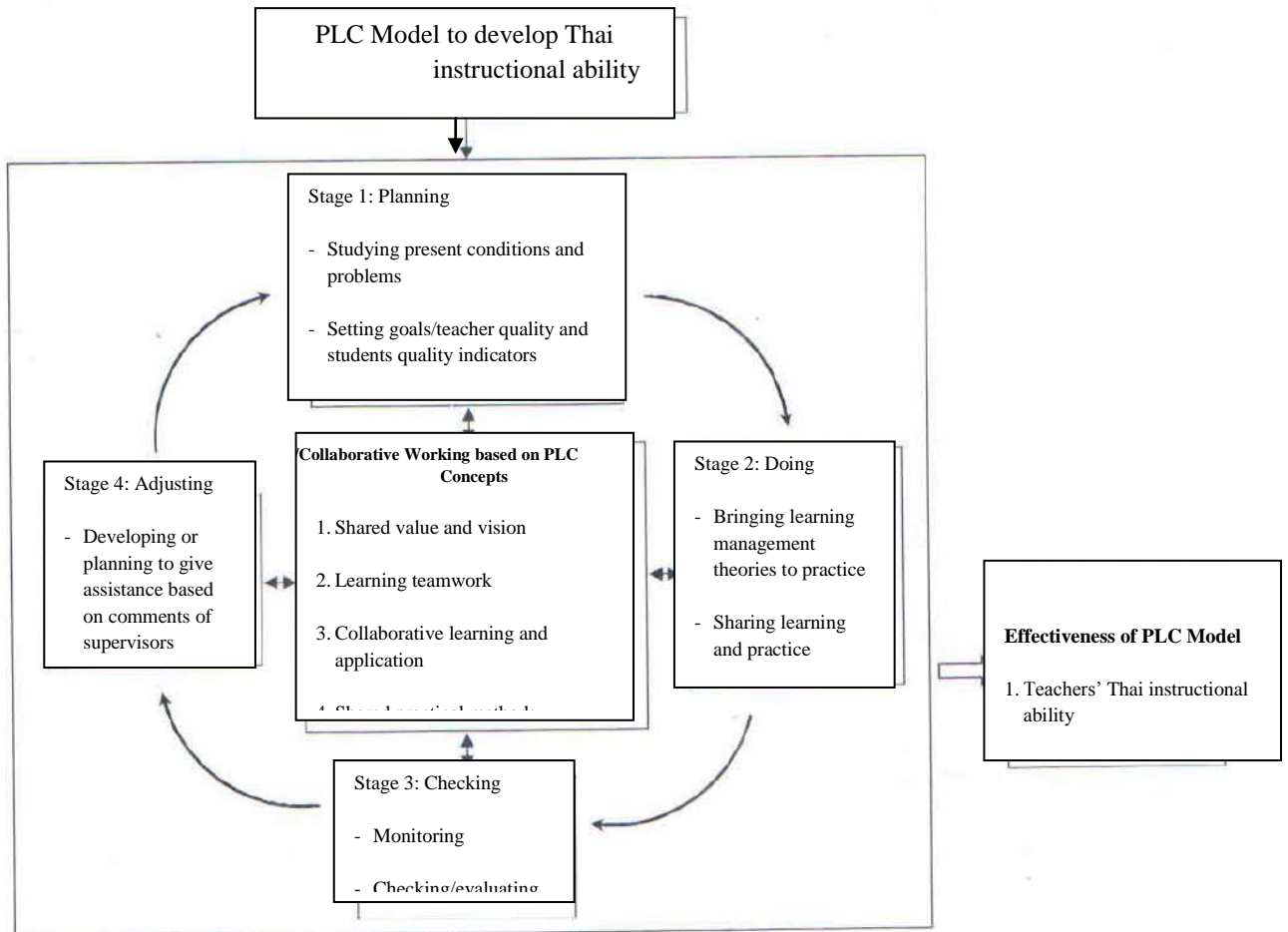


Figure 1: *The PLC Administrative Model for Thai Language Instructional Ability Development*

The PLC administrative model for Thai language instructional ability development at primary schools in three southern border provinces is an integration of PLC concepts in all steps of Deming cycle: planning, doing, checking, and adjusting:

1. Planning

A step of preparation for setting collaborative operation guidelines, environmental management and factors supporting Thai language instructional ability of the teachers based on participation of stakeholders by creating shared vision and goal, learner-centered approach. Planning process consists of 4 steps: 1) studying present conditions and problems to accept present conditions, collaboratively reflect problems, analyze causes of problems

and find out problem solutions, 2) setting goals/teacher quality and students quality indicators including student development goals, student evaluation indicators, teachers' instructional goals and teachers' instructional effectiveness indicators, 3) developing curriculum/designing learning management by understanding curriculum, learning strands, indicators and learning plan design, and 4) creating collaborative plans through idea exchanging calendars and supervising calendars.

2. Doing

This is the step of bringing theories to practice, development and problem solving, including sharing practical experience for continuous instructional development. There are 3 main components: 1) bringing learning plan into classroom through teacher preparation, learning management, assessment and evaluation, 2) sharing practical methods by setting exchanging issues, exchanging problems and problem solutions, and drawing a conclusion of learning issues, and 3) adjusting and developing practical methods based on results from learning evaluation to manage learning based on individual differences.

3. Checking

This is a step of collaborative supervision and evaluation to reflect the teachers' instruction for development and build up their practical morale. There are 3 main components in this step: 1) supervision/monitoring of appointed educational supervisor committee through class observation as planned in the supervision calendar, giving reflection, 2) assessment and evaluation – learners and teachers compared with their indicators, 3) data analysis/conclusion – learning result analysis to see whether there are some parts that must be developed or adjusted; then inform the teachers.

4. Adjusting

This is a step of using evaluation results to plan curriculum/Thai language instruction/goals/indicators and learner and teacher development activities or projects, which causes continuous development and sustainable PLC development.

5. Discussion

The PLC administrative model for the development of Thai language instruction at primary schools in three southern border provinces is an integration of PLC concepts in Deming cycle. The application must be consistent with school contexts. Another important

key is physical preparation and relationship among teachers in the schools, especially school administrators who must have knowledge and understanding as they are important people to propel the model application in encouraging leadership, learning inspiration and confidence of teachers and confirm the effectiveness of the model in solving their instructional problems. Therefore, there are 4 stages of operation that would be discussed as follows:

Stage 1: Planning

This is a starting point of model application. The PLC concepts influences professional value and vision that are basis of learning community establishment based on learner-centered concepts. To apply PLC concepts in developing teachers' Thai language instruction, it is necessary that every teacher must have shared value and vision, and the same goal is development of Thai learners' learning based on standards of the basic education core curriculum. The aforementioned conforms to Hord (1997, p.19)'s concepts stating that the shared vision among teachers is students' learning focus that creatively uses value, vision, learning and leaning outcomes. It pushes learning community members to develop themselves professionally to learners' learning standards (Senge, 1990; DuFour et al., 2006). Therefore, setting shared value and vision among teachers, administrators and stakeholders is a starting points of learning power creation. Newmann and Wehlage (1995, p.16) express that a factor leading to student development is teachers' agreement of school vision relating to students, students' learning ability, and shared roles of guardians, teachers and administrators. Planning stage must therefore integrate PLC concepts consistently, including shared value and vision, learning teamwork, collaborative learning and application, shared practical methods, determination towards continuous improvement and conditions of support and making relationship.

Moreover, the creation of teachers' collaborative working plan is a main factor of PLC establishment. Louis and Kruse (1995, p. 234) state that a physical conditional factor supporting the PLC is time for sharing ideas and giving positive reinforcement, so the school must manage time for this session by fixing schedule and target group obviously. The schedule may be adjusted based on individual teachers' timetable. There might be class observation among teachers and supervision of administrators as operational framework for Thai language instructional development and Thai language instructional problems in three southern border provinces, in which most Thai teachers are not Thai-major graduates who lack of knowledge and understanding towards content, standards and indicators. Their classroom management is therefore based on textbook, and the teachers cannot finish

teaching all content as it is too much. An important factor of the PLC administrative model application is assistance among teachers to reduce working loneliness. When the teachers collaboratively set Thai language instructional vision, they must also collaboratively plan instructional goals and indicators, and design instructional plan. Thai teachers (Thai-major graduates), educational supervisors or Thai language experts are mentors. These experts also set teacher characteristics enabling the teachers to teach effectively such as having Thai language knowledge and understanding, a variety of instructional techniques, classroom management ability, etc. that reflect through behaviors to achieve the goals. There must also be set goals/indicators of students that are consistent with the basic education core curriculum, and details of each indicator must be appropriate and consistent with school contexts.

Stage 2: Doing

This is the step of concretely bringing model to practice and shared goals to classroom to collaboratively develop and solve Thai language instruction by the use of PLC concepts, share practical methods, apply them in the classroom, and solve the problems in classroom with determination. The main factors of model application are time management and sharing opportunities for ideas and experience sharing towards instructional problems or methods to succeed Thai language instruction. The PLC context can encourage teamwork that enables the teachers not to be lonely as there are many people help them develop and improve their instruction. Kanold (2011, p.37) states that an integration of human being of individual person causes strength of school since a single man cannot answer all questions. The man learns and helps each other for development and growth all the time. Moreover, the PLC is a collaborative learning area through a variety of methods such as learning reflection, dialogue, exploration, concepts, creativity, systematic thinking, knowledge building, learning based on brain working and knowledge management, etc. Each teacher or teacher group can collaborative select learning model that is appropriate with each learning activity.

Effective knowledge sharing takes place with certain plan by fixing sharing issues in advance so that the teachers who prefer to participate can prepare information related to the issues to achieve goals or needs. The teachers in PLC must create cultures of respect and trustworthiness in order that each teacher is completely able to share experience, problems, instructional strategies or solutions. It causes collaborative learning and solution to develop students' Thai language learning development achieving goals/indicator. Darling-Hammond (1998, p.151) supports that the PLC aiming at developing students' learning based on

teachers' collaboration and students' needs influences an increase of learning outcomes, and it is sometimes higher than standard. Another important factor is the teachers must record or conclude learning issues while or after sharing to be information for their instructional development conforming to students' potential and differences. Therefore, the integration of PLC administrative model must be consistent with collaborative learning and application, sharing practical methods, continuous improvement determination, including time for knowledge sharing.

Stage 3: Checking

This is the step of supervising, monitoring, following and reflecting to continuously improve Thai language instruction and instructional style that is proper with the context. There must be the process of evaluation to ensure effectiveness of the model in indicating whether it achieves goals, and the evaluation results will be used to improve and adjust the model to get needed goals. Collaborative working among Thai teachers causes professional development of Thai teachers that propels their needs to be successful, so they will try to achieve learning goal continuously (Englert & Rent, 1995; Hollins et al., 2004; Philips, 2003; Supovitz, 2002). Hollins et al. (2004) express that the teachers who participate in learning community continuously improve students' learning to reach the goal by creating concepts and new strategies to solve the problems in instructional crisis. The evaluation process is exactly important in PDCA process and consistent with determination in continuously adjusting the PLC. Therefore, learning community of Thai teachers must regularly be evaluated.

Supervision and monitoring in learning community emphasize the creation of teachers' learning power in encouraging their morale and teamwork by fixing certain calendar and clear goals of supervision and monitoring in a variety of methods such as classroom visiting by administrators to build up teachers' morale, asking students towards learning process if they feel that they are learning in authentic conditions in the classroom, and friendly supervision among teachers or educational supervisors who are expert in Thai language instruction. These methods lead to reflection for Thai language instructional development, build up morale among teachers. According to several research findings, the teachers who participate in learning community present positive working results in terms of having opportunity to evaluate their colleagues, for instance, learning community structure helps primary school teachers to be evaluated through collaborative working such as sharing of lesson plans, instructional materials and reflection for instructional development

(Lieberman, 2003; Silva, 2003; Whitford & Fisher, 2003; Wood, 2003). It is really important to the teachers to open their mind to accept evaluation results. Boyd (1997, p. 306) states that the important characteristics of a person in learning community are to accept evaluation result and to respect others so that the results will be useful for self-development and students' learning development plan.

Stage 4: Adjusting

This is an application stage of using evaluation results for the continuous improvement of curriculum/goal/indicators, activity plan, and both student and teacher development project, which is consistent with PLC concepts in terms of continuously improving and developing Thai language instructional ability with determination, including providing physical resources and building relationship for the sustainable application of PLC administrative model and extend the model to other teachers.

6. Conclusion

The PLC administrative model for the development of Thai language teachers' instruction is developed by the synthesis of literature review and related research to create PLC components and synthesize to be a basic model. After that, the model is investigated its appropriateness and possibility through in-depth interview and focus group discussion. The result shows that the model is appropriate and possible for the improvement of Thai language teachers' instructional ability in primary schools in three southern border provinces. It is a continuous operation through Deming cycle that integrates PLC concepts in all operational steps to give opportunity for collaborative work between school administrators and teachers in developing effectiveness of Thai teachers' instruction sustainably, especially encouraging and supporting knowledge sharing among teachers to have the same goal that is students' Thai language learning development. This aims at increasing students' Thai language proficiency based on curriculum standards, and helping the teachers to search for more information and exactly develop themselves sustainably. This model is possibly applied in all strands; however, there is a concern towards the utilization, that is, it must be adjusted to be appropriate and consistent with the school context. For better conclusion, the researcher will examine the model effectiveness within two participative schools and present the results later.

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