

Professional Learning Communities: Learning Sites for Primary School English Language Teachers in Vietnam

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
School of Education
University of Technology Sydney

September 2017

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Certificate of Authorship

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest and sincerest gratitude to Dr Jacqueline Widin, my main supervisor, for her helpful guidance and wholehearted support. Reflecting on my doctoral journey, I acknowledge the extraordinary amount of time she gave generously, from my very first days of drafting the topic of my study to the very last stage of completing the thesis. From the bottom of my heart, I regard Dr Widin as my second Mom in both my academic and social life. She gave me - a novice researcher - her wonderful scaffolding as much as a mother helps a baby to walk. Also, her warm heart, sweet words and thoughtful gifts really lifted me up whenever I felt homesick or mentally suffered over the last few years.

My sincere thanks go to Associate Professor Liam Morgan, my alternate supervisor. With his insight and sharpness he gave me helpful suggestions in the critical stages of conducting the study and completing this thesis, which has helped my work reach fruition.

I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Alastair Pennycook, Dr Ross Forman, Associate Professor Jennifer Hammond, and Dr Ann Reich for their useful comments on my study. I also would like to thank the other professors, administrative staff and friends in the School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (the University of Technology, Sydney) for their encouragement, friendliness and practical assistance. I acknowledge the editorial assistance of Dr Terry Fitzgerald and Ms Ruth McHugh.

I am indebted to the participants in this study for their great support and valuable information. Without their enthusiasm and cooperation, this study could not have come into being. I am also keen to say honest thanks to my colleagues in Vietnam for their encouragement and considerable support while I left my duties at university behind to pursue my doctoral study overseas.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Vietnamese Government and the University of Technology, Sydney for granting me a doctoral scholarship to undertake this study. Without their financial support, I would not have had such a great experience in conducting this research and living an enjoyable life in Sydney.

My special thanks go to my housemates in Sydney, with whom I found wonderful company that I would not ever have found elsewhere. Being with them in Sydney for four years, I felt like family while being away from home; I learned lessons of sharing and caring while living on a tight budget and exchanged valuable experience and resources while learning to become a researcher.

Last but not least, my heartfelt appreciation goes to my beloved family for their enormous sacrifices, encouragement and unconditional support. I have received eternal love, remarkable encouragement and unconditional support from my parents and my parents-in-law in my life and particularly in completing this thesis. My siblings gave me both mental and financial support while I was studying overseas. I would like to show my deep sense of gratitude to my husband and my three daughters for their everlasting love, understanding and personal sacrifices. They have been my anchors and sunshine for the past five years and always will be. I am particularly grateful to my little baby for her tolerance of the sufferings of a PhD mother since the very first days of her life to grow up as a clever child.

My colleagues' joke '*You're raising two babies at the same time*' now becomes true thanks to such great support I have received from my supervisors, colleagues and family.

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Glossary

Demonstration lesson: refers to an English lesson on a chosen topic, which is delivered to primary school students and observed by all the participants in a professional learning community.

Demonstration teacher: refers to the teacher from a professional learning community who is delivering the demonstration lesson.

English as a foreign language (EFL): refers to English language learning in which the main source of English language input is mainly from teaching and learning inside classrooms, and the teacher plays a central role in the success of his or her students' English learning.

In-service teacher: refers to the teacher who has graduated from his or her teacher training program at university and college, and is currently teaching at an institution.

Microteaching: refers to the teacher's demonstration of a specific strategy or technique in teaching EFL; for example, microteaching a language game used as a warm-up activity.

Practicum: refers to the period when a pre-service teacher interns at a high school to learn and practise teaching, under the supervision of a high school teacher.

Pre-service teacher: refers to the student who is undergoing training to become a teacher in his or her formal teacher training programs at university or at college.

List of Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|---|
| CEFRL | Common European Framework of Reference for Languages |
| DOET | Department of Education and Training |
| EFL | English as a foreign language |
| ELT | English language teaching |
| MOET | Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training |
| BANA | Britain, Australasia and North America |
| Non-BANA | other countries than Britain, Australasia and North America |
| PLC | Professional learning community |
| PET | Primary school English language teacher |
| T | Teacher |
| TEYL | Teaching English to younger learners |

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Abstract

The present qualitative case study set out to examine the processes of an innovative professional learning activity, known as professional learning communities (PLCs), which operated as learning sites for primary school English language teachers (PETs) in Thanh Van,* a city in Vietnam. A majority of the PETs were originally trained as secondary school English language teachers and therefore were grappling with the new demands of teaching in a primary setting. Their professional learning has been under-researched and so offered a unique opportunity for research into the ways the PLCs assisted (or not) in the PETs' development. A sociocultural perspective, which highlights the situatedness and interactiveness of teacher learning, was adopted as a theoretical lens to understand teacher learning in this particular context.

This study comprised two phases of data collection. The data included 10 observations of the meetings of four PLCs, 4 semi-structured interviews with three PLCs' leaders and an EFL consultant and 20 semi-structured interviews with seven PETs after observing their EFL lessons at primary schools. Thematic analysis with an iterative coding process was used to interpret the observations and interviews.

The research shows that the PLCs were recontextualised, incorporating not only common features of any teacher community as reviewed in literature but also unique features relevant to the particularities of the specific context. These particularities were evident in their formal structure, multilayered leadership and complex learning relationships. The findings clearly suggest that established as a top-down formal professional activity, the reshaped PLCs allowed for bottom-up professional learning. The PETs engaged in their learning process as active and thoughtful learners. Their learning was socially mediated through professional interactions in the PLCs, which promoted situated learning, peer learning and scaffolding among the participants. However, teachers' full participation was affected by some factors including insufficiently developed collegiality among teachers, cultural expectations on their social roles in leading professional learning

and time constraints. However, generally, the PETs and other stakeholders perceived the PLCs to be of benefit to teachers' knowledge and identity development and networking.

The study makes significant contributions to the knowledge about the role of PLCs in teachers' professional development, particularly within a context where this form of teacher learning is unfamiliar. The thesis makes a number of recommendations, which aim to strengthen the basis for collaborative learning amongst Vietnamese teachers and to suggest models of PLCs appropriate to the Vietnamese context.

* pseudonym

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