Review Article

Professional Learning Communities and Democratic Ideals: The Influence of John Dewey

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Abstract: This paper conceptualizes as well as theorizes how Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) demonstrate democratic principles using John Dewey's philosophy of education and democracy. The study reviewed the meaning of democracy and its characteristics and highlighted PLCs as social spaces for building democracy in schools. Also, the study explored whether a relationship existed between PLCs and democracy as ideally conceived. The reason behind this exploration was to ascertain whether the environment created in schools and the activities of teachers in their PLC groups serve as core components of establishing PLCs. The study revealed that the formation and implementation of PLCs truly illuminate democratic principles because all teachers take an active part in discussions and deliberations in matters affecting them; members remain committed to the course of the group and the school system because they feel as part; respect and tolerate the views of others, especially minority views and; take part in the decision-making process of the group. The nurturing of these ideals develops informed democratic citizens who would be capable of influencing local, state, and national level decisions and policies. These principles could also be passed on to their students.

1. Introduction

Globally, education systems are evolving to provide for the ever-changing world of this 21st century. In the advent of such fast-paced changing world, teachers are crucial in propelling school reforms and development initiatives in enhancing quality education. As professionals, teachers are responsible for planning and implementing the curriculum, teaching and learning process. To this end, teachers are required more than ever to learn to improve their professional knowledge and skills to be able to respond to the challenges that confront humanity such as "globalization, liberalization, and rapid development" and expansion of information and communication technology" [42].

As teachers are responsible for planning and implementing the **curriculum or teaching** and learning process, professional learning communities had and continue to receive special "attention from policy makers, scholars and practitioners" globally [52] as the best type of "continuous and job embedded" professional development opportunities which will enhance the quality of teaching which in turn affect the learning for every student [5, 37, 42].

To assist learners to become 21st century learners, teachers equally need to undertake a "learning revolution in education to be 21st century learners" [30, 32, 42]. For this to manifest, teachers have and continue to be encouraged to become professional learners, leading to the introduction of the concept of Professional learning community (PLC) by

researchers such as [19], [12] as the best approach of practice which should be established at the school level to assist them to enhance their knowledge and skills which subsequently lead to the improvement of students learning outcomes.

The concept, professional learning community (PLC), which is an aspect of professional development, is now used by many researchers, education reformers as a comprehensive school reform. In PLC' teachers meet together on a regular basis to plan, study the curriculum, and assess their instruction. As teachers learn collaboratively, they develop a strong sense of community which is a major responsibility to improve student learning [52, 45]. In conceptualizing PLC in their study, [44] stated:

> *"By using the term PLC, we signify our interest not only in discrete acts of teacher sharing, but in the establishment of a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, ongoing, and focused on critically examining practice to improve student outcomes. The hypothesis is that what teachers do together outside of the classroom can be as important as what they do inside in affecting school restructuring,   teachers' professional development, and student learning'' (p.3).*

Again, [41] and [20] expressed their perspectives by noting that continuous learning, as well as high quality professional development for teachers are crucial consideration. For example, [20] observes that to enhance the mathematics skills of students and the general achievement of students, teacher professional development has been rated to have more influence than even new textbooks and technology. [15] also summarized the importance of teacher learning and professional development across their careers this way:

> *"After decades of reform, a consensus is building that the quality of our nation's schools depends on the quality of our teachers. If we want schools to produce more powerful learning on the part of students, we have to offer more powerful learning opportunities to teachers. […] Unless teachers have access to serious and sustained learning opportunities at every level in their career, they are unlikely to teach in ways that meet demanding new standards for student learning or participate in the solution of educational problems'' (p. 1014)*

Professional development provides teachers with the opportunity to provide quality instruction to enhance students' achievement. But, does engaging in professional development automatically always lead to professional learning?

2. Materials and Methods

We performed a comprehensive, structured collection of **information or data** from internet sources, Google Scholar, published articles, policy documents, and print media using key words searches and comprehensive document analyses. Subsequently, the relevant articles published on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), democratic principles, John Dewey's philosophy of education and democracy were fully reviewed and their findings were examined.

3. Professional Learning Communities: An Overview

There is suggestion that it is more apparent now that teachers should continue to learn, and that is the reason why professional "learning" has taken the place of professional "development" [14]. It is critical for educators to acquire the necessary knowledge and be wise in the work they do. Teachers should acquire enough knowledge to enable them to change, and the ability to change can guarantee different results. As such, educators should be learners as well as self-developing professionals [1-4].

Currently, in the educational system, PLCs have emerged as a popular concept for all schools where teachers have resolved to collaborate and focus their attention on the

learning of students [24, 8]. A PLC has been described as a public school setting where attention is placed on learning and collaboration and every member shares the responsibility to achieve the desired results [10, 12, 24]. Schools in the United States of America (U.S.A) and other countries around the globe are making serious efforts to establish PLCs as hubs of the work of teachers. PLCs are increasing at a fast pace as educational policy, practice and educational systems around the world are investing so much resources, energy, time, and money to develop themselves as PLCs [49].

The mission of learning communities, according to [12], was not only to ensure that students learn, but also to ensure that students are well taught. PLCs are established to help teachers to be curious, ask and get their questions and problems answered or resolved by and for each other. It also suggests that teachers become experts in their classroom practice, as well as responsible adults in the community in which they practice. In PLCs, teachers learn by working closely with their colleagues, engage in continuous dialogue as well as observe critically their practice, student performance to be able to develop better and effective instructional practices [54]. PLCs present a paradigm shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning, which has positive effect on students' learning outcomes [10, 12, 24].

For teachers to work together to enhance the positive learning of students,' [31] assert that teachers learn best from activities which: (1) focus on instruction and students' learning specific to settings in which they teach; (2) are sustained and continuous, rather than episodic; (3) provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate with colleagues inside and outside the school; (4) reflect teachers' influence about what and how they learn; (5) help teachers develop theoretical understanding of the skills and knowledge they need to learn (p.9). Engaging in these activities help teachers to put into practice what they have learnt as a result of working with their students, ascertain the extent to which the application worked out, be able to assess the results of the application, and make the necessary changes [20, 43]. Affirming this, in a meta-analysis that had span over 35 years of educational research, [31] reiterated that collegiality and professionalism were among five school-level factors that characterized schools as highly effective in improving students' learning outcomes.

It is evident that, it is not easy and simple shifting from a culture of isolation that often characterizes the teaching profession to a culture of a school community; it takes some time for it to take place. It also requires a great deal of commitment and dedication on the part of every member of the school community [10]. [10] posits that it is relevant for teachers to collaborate willingly with other colleagues to create a shared vision and goals in the school community in which they work. For, both school leaders and teachers had encountered difficulties concerning commitment and time, and inadequate knowledge on how to implement the components of PLCs correctly [10, 46, 48].

3.1. Defining or Meaning of PLCs

As a model of teacher professional development, PLC has been associated with a number of models and theories with some critical central beliefs such as: (i) that staff professional development is critical to improve student learning; (ii) that this professional development is most effective when it is collaborative and collegial; and (iii) that this collaborative work should involve inquiry and problem solving in authentic contexts of daily teaching practices" [45] p.63.

Thus, the concept of PLC defies a single universally accepted definition as various authors as well as researchers have defined it differently based on their perspectives [4, 8, 20, 22]. Expressing their frustration, [55] described this situation as very worrying, confusing, and pathetic, while [12] alluded that the way the concept is being applied everywhere and anyhow can cause it to lose its real meaning in the PLC or education literature.

Also, the Annenberg Institute (2004) defines PLCs as "comprising groups of educators, administrators, community members, and other stakeholders who collectively examine and improve their own professional practice. Typically, individual groups are small and meet regularly over a significant period of time" (p.2). Again, after reviewing the literature extensively on learning communities, [7] put forward this definition: "An effective PLC has the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective purpose of enhancing pupil learning" (p.2). Besides, in their book titled, <u>Building a School-Based Teacher Learning Communities: Professional Strategies to Improve Student Achievement</u>, [31] define PLCs as "a place where teachers work collaboratively to reflect on practice, examine the evidence about the relationship between practice and student outcomes, and make changes that improve teaching and learning for the particular students in their classes" (pp.3-4).

Based on the definitions outlined above, two different sets of definitions can be extracted from the concept of PLCs. While one set of definitions on one hand, specifically, [31] and [7] view PLCs as the collaboration of teachers to improve student learning. On the other hand, the Annenberg Institute sees PLCs as a collaboration of teachers, students, and members of the community (i.e., parents, guardians, family members and other stakeholders) in education to promote the learning of students. The latter definition conforms to the three propositions outlined by [19] of communities which are related: "(1) the professional communities of educators, (2) learning communities of teachers and students, and (3) the stakeholder community" (p.6).

Both sets of definitions are very relevant to the learning of students. In as much as the second definition is concerned, our view is very critical. Possibly, teachers will develop themselves by improving their knowledge, skills, and professional practice by collaborating to enhance students learning, this alone will not and cannot be adequate enough in improving students learning without getting the support or working together with the members and organizations of the local community—parents, guardians, family members, chiefs, philanthropists, organizations and other stakeholders.

From the definitions outlined thus far, PLCs, although, may be explained in different ways and in different contexts, they seem to have common characteristics where teachers or a group of people work together to share and reflect on their practice, examine critically the relationship between their practice and student learning outcomes, and make the necessary adjustments to enhance teaching and learning of students [7, 3, 45].

3.2. Reasons for establishing/creating PLCs

A number of reasons have been advanced concerning the creation of PLCs: "To increase coherence, to reduce isolation, to develop teacher knowledge, and to intervene early when students are in danger of failing" [36, p.6]. When comparing education to other organizations operating in this age of technology, [36] argued that education should make every effort to invest in its own human resources to achieve its goals. The authors assert that it would be a challenge to train as well as equip students with the requisite knowledge and skills in the 21st century if teachers and administrators in schools are not given the opportunity to learn and have a clear view of the century through a lifelong professional learning for them. With regards to their structure and organization, PLCs are capable of assisting schools to change course concerning how they think and practice which propel any school and student to be successful in the future [36].

Highlighting on the isolation nature of teaching and the evolution of PLCs, [9] postulated that the emergence of PLC was seen as the best strategy for school reform to deal with the entrenched culture of "isolation, fragmentation, and privatization" that had characterized the teaching profession (p.18). Confirming the creation of PLCs in American schools, [54] opined that PLCs responded to the existing structure of isolation which had led to an increase in working individually, preservation of existing conditions, values, and traditional practices, and "present-minded norms" (p.9). Also, [16] emphasizes that new

reforms were needed in order to eradicate teacher isolation and resolve the frequent incoherence among improvement strategies. There were clarion calls for the ineffective practices to be replaced with collaborative team work where teachers would embrace responsibility dealing with the outcomes of students' learning. Concerning the organizational arrangement, PLC is recognized as a strong form of staff development which has the potential to transform and improve schools in a country [24].

PLC as a concept, is established firmly in two critical assumptions [10, 53]. First, it is assumed that knowledge that teachers accumulate is established in their day-to-day lived experiences, and well understood by engaging in critical reflection with their colleagues. Second, the assumption is grounded in the idea that when teachers engage actively in PLCs, their professional knowledge tends to increase as well as improve student learning [3, 8, 10].

3.3. Characteristics of PLCs

Different characteristics have been advanced for PLCs by various authors. For instance, [19] employed attributes in her description; [28], [12] and [13] used characteristics and; [18] adopted dimensions in her study.

After undertaken a study in urban areas, [28] concluded that the creation of communities of teachers was very important. The researchers outlined five characteristics that were associated with the communities: "(1) shared values; (2) reflective dialogue; (3) deprivatization of practice; (4) focus on student learning; and (5) collaboration" (p. 28). The researchers note that schools that are PLCs (or aspire to be PLCs) should demonstrate at least, minimal aspect of each of the above characteristics. Concluding their study, they suggested that though the culture of the school is important, demographics plays crucial role, and in their hypothesis—the major role of PLC is to make teachers responsible for the learning of students.

Also, [19, 26, 29] after reviewing the literature on PLCs identified seven attributes: (1) Supportive and Shared Leadership, (2) Collective Creativity, (3) Shared Values and Vision, (4) Supportive Conditions, (5) Physical Conditions, (6) People Capacities, and (7) Shared Personal Practice. Again, after synthesizing the literature on PLCs, [7] accepted five characteristics. They include: (i) shared values and vision, (ii) collective responsibility for pupils' learning, (iii) reflective professional inquiry, (iv) collaboration focused on learning and group as well as individual, (v) professional learning. They added three other characteristics that they consider to be important. They are: (f) inclusive membership, (g) mutual trust, respect and support, and (h) openness, networks and partnerships (p. iii).

4. John Dewey's philosophy of education

In *Democracy and Education*, [11] sees education as social function. He believes that we do not educate as individual but as a collective group. Education, to Dewey, is life renewal through transmission. Dewey emphasizes, "the continuity of any experience, through renewing of the social group. Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life" (p.2). Comparing Dewey's conception of education with PLC, this aligns with the characteristic of collective responsibility, where PLC serves as a social group. Here, teachers engage and interact meaningfully to renew their knowledge, skills, ideas, values, and attitudes with the sole aim of influencing positively the learning outcomes of students.'

Also, [11] defines education as a form of communication. He **stresses or emphasizes** that society could only continue to live on through transmission and communication. He states that people live in a community based on things which they commonly share, and communication is the avenue through which they share common things. Dewey notes that the common things which they should have to be able to create a community or society

include "aims, beliefs, aspirations, knowledge—a common understanding-like-mindedness as the sociologists say" (p.4). Teachers in a PLC have the same goal of renewing their skills to improve the learning of their students. In their collaborative approach, there is communication—sharing of ideas and experiences from their teaching activities or practices. Through communication teachers develop better understanding of themselves, their responsibilities, jobs, professionalism and build strong bond of trust between and among themselves.

Again, to [11], any social life calls for teaching and learning which should be on a permanent basis. Living together is a form of education, "as it enlarges and enlightens experience, it stimulates and enriches imagination; it creates responsibility for accuracy, vividness of statement of thought" (p.6). Dewey posits that living alone—both mentally and physically—affects the individual because it does not help him/her to reflect on past life "to extract its net meaning" (p.6).

Furthermore, Dewey conceptualizes education as a process through which to foster, nurture, and cultivate. As human beings, our activities are associated with others, and what we can do depends on what society expects, their demands, what they approve of, and their condemnations. Since we are connected with others, it is impossible to achieve anything without taking into consideration the activities of others. This philosophy aligns well with the concept of PLC in the sense that it is a process and teachers learn to foster peaceful collaboration, nurture their knowledge and skills through collaboration, and cultivate positive attitudes toward each other and their work. In PLCs, there is interconnectedness and the ultimate aim is the promotion of students learning outcomes.

In a similar vein, [40] in his book, Education and Community: A Radical Critique of Innovative Schooling, describes how these three concepts—education, community, and quality of life are linked and related to provide a meaningful living. He criticizes the limitation of the "two context life, that is, a life spent mainly in the nuclear family and the corporate organization" (p.14). Oliver suggests building of a third context, "a transfamily community-orientated context, concerned less with the promotion of individual growth and more with improving the quality of collective primary group life" (p.14). Although, Oliver is suggesting ways various professionals in the education sector—especially, educators can orient their lives in such a way that they do not separate themselves from the common people. This idea relates well with the concept of PLC where individual growth is de-emphasized for collective growth of all teachers.

5. The concept of democracy

A growing body of study both nationally and internationally describes the need to give democracy an important place in education [33]. No consensus has been reached on the definition of democracy and therefore, has been defined differently by many authors. The term democracy, according to [39], originated from the Greek word "demokratia" meaning "rule of the people," was coined from (demos) "people" and (kratos) "power" or "rule" in the 5th century B.C. It is worth noting that the political system postulated by the Athenians took the form in which democratic citizenship was reserved exclusively to an elite class of free men only. It excluded both slaves and women from participation [35, 39].

Larry Diamond cited in [39] delivered a lecture titled, "What is Democracy"? In his presentation, he explains democracy as a system of government which denotes four key elements:

    (i.)   A system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections;

    (ii.)   Active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life;

    (iii.)   Protection of the human rights of all citizens; and

    (iv.)   A rule of law in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens cited in [39].

According to [33], democracy constitutes five basic tenets: "(i) Representation, in terms of which individuals are represented on issues affecting their lives or the lives of their children; (ii) Participation, in terms of the involvement of individuals in the decision-making process; (iii) Rights, comprising a set of entitlements which are protected and common to all individuals; (iv) Equity, pertaining to the fair and equal treatment of individuals and groups, and; (v) Informed choice, with tools being provided for decision-making which is based on the provision of relevant information and the application of sound reasoning" (pp.14-15).

[11] on the other hand, states that "democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p.87). [6] views Dewey's definition as a social concept of democracy, and argues that democracy does not only hinge on making decisions collectively in the political arena, but also involves taking part in the "construction, maintenance and transformation of social and political life more generally''. In other words, in this social conception of democracy, to [6], democracy denotes inclusive aspects of social as well as political actions.

[33] contend that two major arguments clearly demonstrate that schools that are democratic are also viewed as effective schools. First, paying attention to the words of parents, motivating them to take part in the activities of the school, and entrusting them with power, authority, and responsibility are the best ways to foster and improve the effectiveness of the school. The authors propose that a school with an effective culture involves the basic principles and values of democracy which include "tolerating and respecting others, participating and expressing views, sharing and disseminating knowledge, valuing equity and equality and the opportunity for students to make judgments and choices" (p.15).

The second argument deals with the main aims of education. [33] indicate that if the goal of education is to develop citizens who are democratic and a democratic society— then it should be planned and managed in such a way that it could work effectively to realize the needed results.

For [33], democracy hinges on some conditions, which can also be considered as the basis of living a democratic life. Some of the conditions include: "(1) the open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity; (2) the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems and policies; (3) concern for the welfare of others and the common good; an understanding that democracy is an idealized set of values that must be lived and guide the life of people; (4) the organization of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life" (p.15). While these conditions provide the basis for democratic living, how are they available and practiced in the school environment?

6. PLCs as social spaces for democracy-Dewey's perspectives

[25] employ two terms to describe how schools could be transformed into democratic learning communities — 'social space' and 'spatial practice' where social relationships and actions of individuals' take place (p.312). The authors explain that social space goes beyond just the occurring of social interaction, but it should rather be comprehended as established by interacting with the social. As such, to create learning communities that are democratic, the school is recognized "as a place that shapes and is shaped by space and social practices—spatialized practices" (p.313).

Highlighting the differences between "place" and "space," [25] indicate that "space is a practiced place" (p.313). Therefore, the space located in the school building could be changed into a place of practice by the activities of teaching and learning. Indeed, considering the school as a social space, the activities and actions of teachers and other members of staff mold the school and classrooms within them.

[25] hold the notion that having better understanding of the school as a social space is useful when ascertaining its challenges to make current practices more democratic. The authors pose a number of questions in their attempt to explore the view of social space and spatial practice within schools for democratic learning communities for teachers:

"What is the nature of social space? What does it mean for learning communities to be practiced places? What is necessary and who is responsible for transforming the social space of contemporary schools into practiced places of democratic learning?" (p.312).

Drawing on [33] democratic principle of participation of individuals in making decisions, and PLCs' attribute of shared and supportive leadership, school principals share power, authority, decision-making, promoting, and nurturing leadership with teachers [17]. This attribute conforms to Dewey's (1944) and [6] democratic ideals. [6] states that democracy relies on collective decision making of the group. democratic societies enjoy/practices open participation which is "focused" on the well-being and the good of the citizens [56]. Therefore, as teachers interact, engage, discuss, and deliberate on their teaching practices, they arrive at a common and collective decision to increase the learning of students. This demonstrates democracy in their groups.

Also, [11] describes that men come together because of different ways and reasons. He proposes that any education that any group bequeaths to its members tries "to socialize the members, but the quality and the value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group" (p.83). Similarly, [25] opine that a space or place can be made democratic to some extent by having a common goal. In support, [11] notes, "men live in a community by virtue of the things which they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common" (p. 4). [25] contend that if a community is considered democratic, and democracy is viewed as communal, then community denotes a place where democracy is practiced. When schools demonstrate democratic ideals through activities such as living in community, communicating, having common purpose, aims, beliefs, aspirations, and knowledge as described by Dewey, then "the school becomes a democratically practiced place, made so by people's spatial practices. Schools, as transformed democratic spaces of learning, are made so through democratic discourses and practices" [25, p.313].

Again, in any social group, members have shared and common interests with some kind of interaction and cooperation. Dewey poses these questions to elicit answers: (a) how numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared? (b) How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association? This idea by Dewey does not contradict the concept of PLCs, as there are shared values and vision (i, e., shared mission, focus, and goals) being one of the attributes of PLCs. Based on the questions, there are many and varied interests that members in PLCs share. And for a group to have common values, [11] reiterates, "all the members must have an equable opportunity to receive and to take from others. There must be a large variety of shared undertakings and experiences" (p. 84). And this is common practice in PLCs as teachers share information and experiences from their classrooms through cooperation and interaction with one another.

In addition, [25] emphasize that democratic teacher leaning community is shown when teachers "openly share, observe, and discuss each other's teaching, methods, and philosophies" (p.312). In this sense, as teachers continue to explore and discuss various approaches to traditional teaching practices as well as developing democratic teaching practices, there is promotion of working, teaming, and learning collaboratively. The authors reiterate that the study groups of teachers and teams of action research provide typical instances of spaces where teachers get the opportunities to work collaboratively and carefully to review common concerns. Spending money, time, and energy into the practice of inquiry, according to [25] form the "heart of a democratic community" (p.312). As teachers engage in inquiry, their practice is made available to the public space in their attempt to find solutions to problems through discussions with their colleagues. Teachers' engagement such as planning the curriculum, program assessment, and meeting in their book clubs and study groups as platforms to deliberate build a community in the social space.

Moreover, what makes a learning community a place for practiced democracy is based on characteristics such as engaging in discussion on shared common goals and the

sharing of resources in the community [25]. The authors point out that these resources are made of "routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice" (p.83).

More so, in relating learning communities that are democratic to communities of practice, [25] mention that they present sophisticated as well as constant changes with a deposit "of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (p.98). [25] argue that for a school to be transformed into a democratic learning community, there is the utmost need to clearly and openly respect and uphold individuals' diversity, dialogue in all forms of social interactions, the norms of making decisions, the nature of conflict and its importance, and total participation in the activities of the community. Learning communities that practice democracy need to have or develop full understanding of the process in which knowledge features prominently into the social and historical aspect of the community and also, how knowledge acquired can benefit individual and collective learning [25]. They argue that learning communities that are democratic exhibit the characteristics of knowledge creation instead of holding the assumption that others are the only capable people to produce all knowledge, and conflict and controversy form an integral part in the process of learning. Notwithstanding, the culture of collegiality should be embraced which "encourages solidarity, cooperation, mutual assistance, mutual respect, and advice among members based on professionalism" [24]. The existence of collegiality among teachers in PLCs will breed an atmosphere of peace, harmony, and unity all the time. Negative tendencies such as "favoritism, bias, cronyism, slander, and malice in their interactions" and engagement should be avoided [24]. These two critical components; respect and trust are effective in building and sustaining PLCs, and also play essential role in encouraging a positive relationship for learning among members [24].

Likewise, equally important in any democratic community is the provision of time for the ideas of people to be heard [25]. This aligns with [33] democratic condition of free flow of ideas irrespective of their popularity. In learning communities, the space provided for the ideas and voice of teachers to be heard as well as engaging in dialogue depict democratic ideals. This kind of dialogue should be inclusive and highly respectful of the voice of every teacher. Not only respecting the voice of individual teacher, but also allowing free flow of ideas, demonstrates strong concern for the rights and dignity of individual teachers, and the well-being of other teachers that help in achieving the common good of the community [25]. To Dewey (1944), an interest in common good is the ultimate duty of every person in a democratic community.

Equally important, as the social space of the school is being democratized, there is also the need for space where teachers do their own things and speak on behalf of each other, and actively participate in decisions that influence learning [25]. It is also essential in an effort to democratize the social space of schools as teachers form learning communities, there is engagement "in discursive and inquiry-oriented practices concerned with generating new knowledge while critically examining existing knowledge in relation to existing social practices" [25, p.316]. In learning communities, spaces made available for dialogue, inquiry, and taking part in activities are put in place purposely for the learning of the individual as well as the collective learning of the group. These spaces enable teachers to meet and critically scrutinize both practical and experiential knowledge concerning teaching and learning, and thus build new understanding with respect to their practice. As such, learning communities that are democratic help teachers to link both their professional as well as practical knowledge with their practice [25].

What is more, [25] observe that communication is critical in any learning community that demonstrate democratic tenets. Regular meetings are scheduled where the searchlight is put on teaching and student learning, issues involving curriculum and instruction, teachers' personal as well as professional growth are discussed. Typical examples where

spaces are provided for democratic dialogue at public fora that are organized for the whole school to look at the needs of teachers, the processes of critical study, taking active part in democratic governance, and sharing values and beliefs.

7. Conclusion

From the discussions thus far, PLCs have emerged as one of the most comprehensive school reforms in education in recent times in the world. Many schools are striving to become PLCs with the ultimate goal of improving student learning when teachers resolve to work together about teaching and learning by acting to improve student learning and their achievement [51]. It is evident from the study that countries all over the world had and continue to establish and implement PLCs because of the tremendous benefits for teacher learning and enhancing student learning outcomes [24].

On the perspectives of Dewey, people live in a community based on things which they share in common. A strong connection exist between community and the good life where people work collectively for their own benefits which are supported with respect. Community is associated with loyal relationships as well as stable social structure. In the community, sincere social interaction is the norm which give individuals a broader sense which goes far and beyond the self with regard to 'me' and 'I' into the 'we' and 'us'. Strong social bonds, commitment, shared values, and common understanding develop among members in the community to help them achieve their common goals. In this community, members build strong social networks, trust and norms that enable them to collaborate for their common benefits.

Also, PLCs generally, work in enhancing teachers' professionalism, practice and students' learning because they embody democratic principles as their foundation. [45] argues that two principles are promoted in the PLC literature— "democratic schools, and schools as Geimenschaft or relationally-bound communities" (p.64). Democracy is at play in PLCs through the constant employment of shared leadership, collective decision making, and stress on dialogue [45]. [11]also holds the notion that space should be created in society—especially, in school, to prepare citizens who are democratic [25]. He recommends that people who take part in this "space" or democracy should exercise caution of their own action toward other members, and also consider other members' action in informing their own action [25, 26]

In PLCs, teachers develop the necessary democratic norms, values, skills, and attitudes by trusting one another, tolerating and accepting the perspectives of others in their deliberations, understanding different perspectives of teachers, taking part in creative debates and dialogues and reflecting on them, and, in a productive manner, work as individuals as well as a group. [25] contend that the participation of teachers, principals, and other members of staff in conjoined professional development that is inquiry-based, results in collaborative teaming, shared governance, and the chance to practice democracy in their PLCs. The democratic values help principals, teachers, and schools to accomplish their goals together.

Again, the emphasis on dialogue (communication) propels PLCs to work. Communicating effectively between principals and teachers is considered very valuable in achieving the vision and mission of schools [9]. Not only communicating between principals and teachers, but also between the schools and parents. [11] views education as form of communication, noting that society can only continue to exist by transmission and communication. Dewey emphasizes that people live in a community as a result of things that they share in common, and "communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common" (p.4). Through effective communication in their learning communities about the vision and mission of the school, study of the curriculum, teaching practices, achievement data of students, lessons and assessment tools, new teaching strategies, and with understanding, teachers learn the values such as love, justice, goodness, wisdom, and responsibility to be dedicated to the goals of the schools [45]. [9] indicate that effective

communication between principals and teachers in PLCs is very important. [9] in a qualitative study, mentioned that there was strong consensus among stakeholders—principals, teachers, and parents that clearly laying out the improvement plan of the school through communication made significant contribution to the achievement of students, teachers' professional growth, and development of strong working relationships between the school and home. Clearly articulating the roles and responsibilities of all members help to develop in them ownership and involvement. Paving the way for all members to participate in discussion lead to the harnessing of untapped talents to increase capacity [9].

In addition, PLCs have been accepted as the best approach to teacher learning because they honor the voices of teachers. Applying [33] principles of defining democracy-(1) representation—where teachers are involved in issues that are impacting their practice and that of their students; (2) participation—where individual teachers take active part in deliberations and final decision-making process in PLCs; and (3) equity—where individual teachers receive equal and fair treatment in their groups. In PLCs, ideas are openly shared, regardless of their popularity [33]. This is a demonstration of democratic ideals in PLCs. [25] stressed on the importance of teachers having joint voices. With one voice, the authors observe that it paves the way to transform schools into places where democracy is practiced. Teachers feel more comfortable discussing personal aspects of their lives as well as their vulnerabilities. [34] contends that in PLCs that tend to support teachers' continuous learning, with discussion and decisions focusing on enhancing student learning outcomes, "school staff value and appreciate their direct involvement in increasing student learning and improving their school" (p.24). With the voices of teachers heard in their communities, the feeling is that their views and opinions are respected and valued, and thus create the opportunity for them to be more innovative and effective in their teaching [23].

Based on conclusion thus far, PLCs demonstrate democratic principles such as sharing and collective decision making, respecting the rights of teachers, communication between and among teachers, and hearing the voice of teachers, among others. This democratic and social concept of education should be encouraged in any educational system around the globe that purports to build a better society.

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