# ชุมชนการเรียนรู้เชิงวิชาชีพในโรงเรียนคาทอลิก: การศึกษาเชิงคุณภาพเพื่อการพัฒนาวิชาชีพครู

# Professional Learning Communities in Catholic Schools: A Qualitative Exploration for Teacher Professional Development

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การศึกษาวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาคุณลักษณะของชุมชนแห่งการเรียนรู้ทางวิชาชีพในโรงเรียนคาทอลิก รวมทั้งศึกษาผลที่มีต่อการพัฒนาวิชาชีพครู โดยเฉพาะโรงเรียนที่อยู่ภายใต้การกำกับดูแลของฝ่ายการศึกษา อัครสังฆมณฑลกรุงเทพฯ การศึกษานี้ใช้กระบวนวิธีวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์เอกสาร จำนวน 151 รายการ ที่มีลักษณะเป็นงานวิจัย หนังสือ และรายงานต่างๆ เพื่อกำหนดกลุ่มคำ ประเด็นหลัก และรูปแบบของชุมชนแห่งการเรียนรู้ทางวิชาชีพในโรงเรียนคาทอลิก การรวบรวมข้อมูลและการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูล ใช้กระบวนการการวิเคราะห์เอกสารโดยการเข้ารหัส จัดกลุ่ม ตามความหมายของกลุ่มคำ ประเด็นหลัก เพื่อให้ได้มาซึ่งผลลัพธ์การวิจัย ได้แก่คุณลักษณะและรูปแบบของชุมชนแห่งการเรียนรู้ทางวิชาชีพในโรงเรียนคาทอลิก จำนวน 6 กลุ่มคุณลักษณะ คือ 1) แบ่งปันการเรียนรู้ของผู้เรียนที่มีเป้าหมาย 2) การเสริมความสำเร็จทางการเรียนรู้ของผู้เรียนที่เกิดจากความร่วมมือของกลุ่มต่างๆ 3) การสะท้อนคิดจากการเรียนรู้เพื่อให้เกิดการปฏิบัติทางวิชาชีพที่ดีกว่าเดิม 4) แบ่งปันและเสริมสร้างศักยภาพของผู้นำ 5) ใช้ผลการเรียนรู้เพื่อการพัฒนาแบบยั่งยืน และ 6) สร้างระบบสนับสนุน : ด้านโครงสร้างองค์กร ความสัมพันธ์ระหว่างเพื่อนร่วมงาน และศักยภาพของพนักงานฝ่ายสนับสนุน ลักษณะสำคัญเหล่านี้สอดคล้องกับคุณค่าการศึกษาคาทอลิกที่เน้นการพัฒนานักเรียนอย่างรอบด้านและพันธกิจร่วมกัน ผลการวิจัยชี้ให้เห็นว่าชุมชนแห่งการเรียนรู้ทางวิชาชีพ เป็นกรอบแนวคิดที่ขับเคลื่อนด้วยพันธกิจ ซึ่งผสานการเติบโตทางวิชาชีพอย่างต่อเนื่องเข้ากับเป้าหมายการศึกษาที่มีรากฐานจากความเชื่อ มีการอภิปรายถึงแนวทางในการเสริมสร้างการดำเนินงานชุมชนการเรียนรู้เชิงวิชาชีพเพื่อการพัฒนาวิชาชีพครูในบริบทของโรงเรียนคาทอลิก

**คำสำคัญ :** ชุมชนการเรียนรู้ทางวิชาชีพ; โรงเรียนคาทอลิก; การพัฒนาวิชาชีพครู; การเรียนรู้ร่วมกัน; การศึกษาแบบองค์รวม

## Abstract

This study explored the characteristics of professional learning communities (PLCs) in Catholic schools and their implications for teacher professional development, particularly in those administered by the Education Department of the Bangkok Archdiocese (EDBA). Using qualitative content analysis of 151 documents, the study identified six features of PLCs within Catholic schools: (1) a shared purpose of student learning, (2) collaborative teams for improved student achievement, (3) reflective collective learning for enhanced professional practice, (4) shared leadership for capacity building, (5) results-oriented learning for sustained improvement, and (6) supportive conditions involving structure, collegiality, and staff capacity. These characteristics align with Catholic educational values emphasizing holistic student formation and communal mission. The findings suggest that PLCs provide a mission-driven framework that integrates ongoing professional growth with faith-based educational goals. Implications for strengthening PLC implementation for teacher professional development within Catholic school contexts are discussed.

**Keywords:** Professional learning communities; Catholic schools; teacher professional development; collaborative learning; holistic education

## Introduction

As schools worldwide respond to growing demands for high-quality teaching and learning, professional learning communities (PLCs) have gained recognition for their capacity to enhance instructional practices and improve student outcomes. Rooted in collaboration, shared inquiry, and ongoing reflection, PLCs enable educators to collectively examine their practices,

address student needs, and pursue professional growth within a supportive community (Bernhardt, 2015; Sriklaub & Ruengtrakul, 2022). This approach, grounded in mutual responsibility and a commitment to continuous learning, has demonstrated effectiveness across diverse educational contexts.

In Catholic education, learning is understood as a collaborative endeavor rooted in vocation. Teaching is therefore regarded not merely as the transmission of knowledge but as a shared responsibility for the academic and personal growth of each student. Catholic schools aim to foster academic excellence alongside moral and spiritual growth, grounded in human dignity and Catholic values (Congregation for Catholic Education [CCE], 1997).

In Thailand, Catholic schools prioritize teacher development to ensure quality education. They achieve this through professional development programs that emphasize ethics and morality as key elements of teaching (Bistis & Kobvithayakul, 2025). The 36 schools under the Education Department of the Bangkok Archdiocese (EDBA) are committed to integrating Catholic identity with national educational reforms (Education Department of Bangkok Archdiocese (EDBA), 2012). However, they face challenges in fostering collaboration and sustaining ongoing professional development (Mhunpiew & Asavisanu, 2022).

Teachers in Catholic schools are called to accompany students as witnesses of faith and integrity (CCE, 2002). PLCs provide a framework that reinforces Catholic principles through shared leadership, reflective dialogue, and mission-aligned practice. (CCE, 2007, 2013). Through this integration, Catholic education—supported by PLCs—seeks to form well-rounded individuals, combining academic excellence with moral and spiritual growth.

Even though PLCs are philosophically congruent with Catholic education, the effective implementation of PLC principles in Catholic schools faces

significant challenges. While many Catholic schools claimed to function as PLCs, few had the structural and cultural systems in place to support deep collaboration and peer feedback (Koelsch, 2016). Issues such as professional isolation, top-down leadership, and insufficient time for meaningful dialogue often prevent PLCs from becoming established (Miller et al., 2022). Even when the time for collaboration is formally scheduled, it may be consumed by administrative tasks instead of focusing on pedagogy and student learning (Koelsch, 2016; Madden, 2020). In smaller schools, finding common planning time can be difficult due to limited staff and overlapping responsibilities. As a result, PLC meetings may often be scheduled for after-school hours, which can lead to teacher fatigue and decreased engagement (Beltramo et al., 2021).

Furthermore, there can be a lack of clarity regarding the goals and processes of PLCs, inadequate training in collaborative structures, and limited confidence among staff in using data or providing peer feedback (Beltramo et al., 2021). Additionally, even in tight-knit school communities, the absence of formal structures to support dialogue and accountability can lead to passive engagement or reliance on informal collaboration rather than fostering systematic learning (Miller et al., 2022).

These challenges highlight the need to examine how PLCs support teacher development while remaining true to Catholic values. This study aims to explore the characteristics of PLCs in Catholic school environments and how these characteristics impact teacher professional development. In doing so, the research contributes to the ongoing discussion on how Catholic schools can promote professional growth while preserving their identity and mission.

## Research Objectives

Drawing from the foundational principles of Catholic education and the core dimensions of PLCs, the objectives of this research are as follows:

1. To explore the characteristics of PLCs in Catholic schools.
2. To offer insights and implications of PLC characteristics for Catholic school teachers to cultivate professional practices.

This study is guided by the following research questions to explore the nature and role of PLCs in Catholic schools. 1) What are the key characteristics of PLCs in Catholic schools? 2) What are the implications of these characteristics for teacher professional development in Catholic schools?

## Literature Review

This literature review provides the necessary background to understand the focus of this study. It begins by explaining what PLCs are and why they are important for improving schools. It highlights key ideas from well-known researchers, especially Hord and DuFour, whose frameworks have helped shape how PLCs are understood and applied in practice. The review also discusses how the values and goals of Catholic education promote the implementation of PLCs, especially in schools focusing on both academic and spiritual growth. Together, these ideas form the foundation for exploring how PLCs are developed and practiced in Catholic schools.

### Definition and Significance of PLCs

PLCs are evidence-based strategies for improving schools by fostering sustained collaboration focused on student learning (Hord, 1997; Tuli & Bekele, 2020). Core to PLCs are shared leadership, collective responsibility, and continuous inquiry cycles, which enhance instructional practices and student

outcomes (Bolam et al., 2005). Unlike traditional, one-off professional development, PLCs provide job-embedded learning that builds trust, innovation, and professional capital through shared norms and reflective dialogue (Stoll et al., 2006). These attributes make PLCs particularly relevant for addressing the complex needs of today's diverse student populations.

### PLCs and Educational Reform Endeavors

PLCs are widely acknowledged as effective strategies for school improvement and teacher development. Education systems globally increasingly promote collaborative practices, data-informed decision-making, and shared student achievement goals, all supported by PLCs through structured collaborative opportunities for educators (Stoll et al., 2006; Vescio et al., 2008).

Recent studies confirm the positive impact of PLCs on teaching quality and student learning outcomes. For instance, research in Thailand found that PLC participation significantly enhanced teachers' collaboration skills, confidence, and competence in applying 21st-century instructional strategies (Worapun et al., 2022). Likewise, Anchunda (2021) reported that involvement in PLCs empowered teachers to develop leadership capacities and more effectively incorporate data-driven insights into instructional planning.

In Singapore, PLCs have been integrated into national education reforms, such as the "Thinking Schools, Learning Nation" initiative, fostering teacher collaboration aligned with lifelong learning goals (Hairon, 2020). Australian contexts similarly emphasize PLCs as grassroots responses to top-down reforms, promoting teacher development and reflective practice to enhance student outcomes (Hudson, 2024).

Despite diverse contexts, PLCs consistently embody principles of prioritizing student learning, fostering collaboration, and applying evidence-based continuous improvement, confirming their relevance across educational settings, including Catholic schools.

**Key Frameworks of PLCs**

PLCs emerged to mitigate teacher isolation and promote authentic collaboration, building on early research on collective reflection and student-centered outcomes (Little, 1982). Hargreaves (1994) warned that superficial or imposed collaboration, or "contrived collegiality," undermines genuine professional engagement.

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006) operationalized PLCs through three big ideas—ensuring student learning, fostering a culture of collaboration, and focusing on results—and six supporting elements, including continuous improvement and collective inquiry. Hord (1997) identified five dimensions for PLC success: shared values and vision, collective creativity, supportive distributed leadership, enabling conditions, and shared personal practice.

Integrating these frameworks provides a comprehensive view of the structural and cultural conditions necessary for PLC effectiveness (DuFour et al., 2006; Hord, 2004). PLCs thrive when clear learning goals align with supportive structures but struggle without cultural readiness or procedural clarity (Stoll et al., 2006).

**DuFour et al.'s Framework (2006)**

Researchers have advanced the field by translating PLC principles into a clear, implementation-focused model for school leaders and teachers (DuFour et al., 2006). DuFour and Eaker (1998) distilled effective PLC practice into three

foundational “big ideas”: 1) Ensuring that students learn—the school’s mission shifts from teaching to learning, with success measured by what students know and can do. 2) A culture of collaboration—teachers work interdependently in collaborative teams, pursuing shared curricular goals and jointly addressing instructional challenges. 3) A focus on results—teams use frequent, common formative assessments to generate evidence of student learning and to inform timely interventions.

These core commitments are supported by six key elements: (1) a focus on learning, (2) a collaborative culture focused on learning for all, (3) collective inquiry into best practices and current reality, (4) action orientation and learning through experience, (5) commitment to continuous improvement, and (6) results orientation (DuFour et al., 2006). DuFour’s framework offers schools a structured cycle for embedding collaboration into daily practice, ensuring team efforts remain student-centered and results-driven.

### Hord’s PLC Framework (1997)

Hord (1997) developed one of the earliest comprehensive models of PLCs, focusing on the cultural and structural conditions necessary for sustained professional learning within schools. The framework outlines five interconnected dimensions: (1) shared values and vision centered on student learning; (2) collective creativity that promotes joint problem-solving; (3) supportive leadership distributed across roles; (4) supportive conditions facilitating collaboration; and (5) shared personal practice, including peer observation and mutual feedback.

Hord’s model provides a foundational understanding of how school-wide collaboration is rooted in trust, mutual respect, and shared purpose. It explains enabling conditions that allow teacher learning to become continuous,

reflective, and collectively owned, ultimately resulting in improved student outcomes.

### Integration of Hord's and DuFour's Frameworks

Integrating DuFour's implementation process with Hord's enabling conditions framework offers a comprehensive perspective on PLCs. DuFour et al. (2006) outline a clear sequence of actions. These include centering discussions on student learning, using data to inform decisions, and maintaining accountability. Together, these steps ensure systematic and goal-oriented practice. Hord's model (1997) specifies cultural and structural foundations—shared vision, distributed leadership, and supportive relationships—necessary for sustainable collaboration.

This integration shows that systematic practices gain effectiveness only when supported by clear conditions (Hord, 2004). PLCs thrive when defined learning goals match strong support structures but struggle without clear procedures or cultural readiness (DuFour et al., 2006). These perspectives collectively illustrate both the environment required for collective learning and the practices that transform shared purpose into measurable improvements in student achievement (Stoll et al., 2006).

### PLCs and Catholic Educational Values

Catholic schools provide a natural context for PLCs given their commitment to mission, community, and faith. Catholic education aims to develop students intellectually, morally, and spiritually, integrating faith and daily life for holistic growth (CCE, 2007). The Church emphasizes shared values, strong relationships, and collaborative pedagogy aligned with PLC principles such as shared responsibility and continuous improvement (CCE, 2002, 2013).

Grounding PLC collaboration in co-responsibility, shared mission, and reflective dialogue strengthens Catholic schools' professional communities, enabling them to live out their religious and moral mission (Beltramo et al., 2021).

**Implementation of PLCs in Catholic Schools: Opportunities and Challenges**

Catholic schools are well positioned to implement PLCs because their core values—trust, moral leadership, and open dialogue—naturally support professional collaboration. The Catholic Church encourages educators to build relationships based on mutual respect, shared mission, and collective responsibility, aligning closely with PLC principles and fostering a culture of continuous improvement (CCE, 2007, 2013).

Although Catholic schools' core values support professional collaboration, hierarchical leadership can restrict teacher participation, weakening PLC ownership (Miller et al., 2022). Cultural norms valuing respect may discourage open disagreement necessary for feedback and reflection (Koelsch, 2016). Balancing authority and democratic leadership requires intentional leadership development aligned with Catholic values (Beltramo et al., 2021; Spillane, 2006).

Additional challenges include limited collaboration time, unclear PLC goals, insufficient leadership training, and scheduling difficulties in smaller schools (Madden, 2020; Beltramo et al., 2021). Despite these, PLCs hold potential for advancing Catholic education by fostering shared purpose and balanced academic and spiritual growth (CCE, 2007).

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework integrates Hord's (1997) and DuFour et al.'s (2006) theories of PLCs with Catholic educational values articulated by the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE, 2002, 2007, 2013). This framework delineates the structural and cultural foundations vital for effective PLCs, aligned with the mission of Catholic education.

Hord's model identifies essential conditions for cultivating a collaborative professional culture, including shared leadership, a unified vision, collective creativity, supportive environments, and shared practice, fostering sustained professional growth. Complementing this, DuFour et al.'s model emphasizes team collaboration, a student-centered focus, and results-oriented practices as mechanisms for improving teaching and learning.

Grounded in Vatican principles, Catholic education envisions schools as communities of faith, service, and shared mission. Core values such as shared responsibility and holistic student formation provide a spiritual lens, positioning PLCs not merely as professional entities but as embodiments of the Church's educational mission.

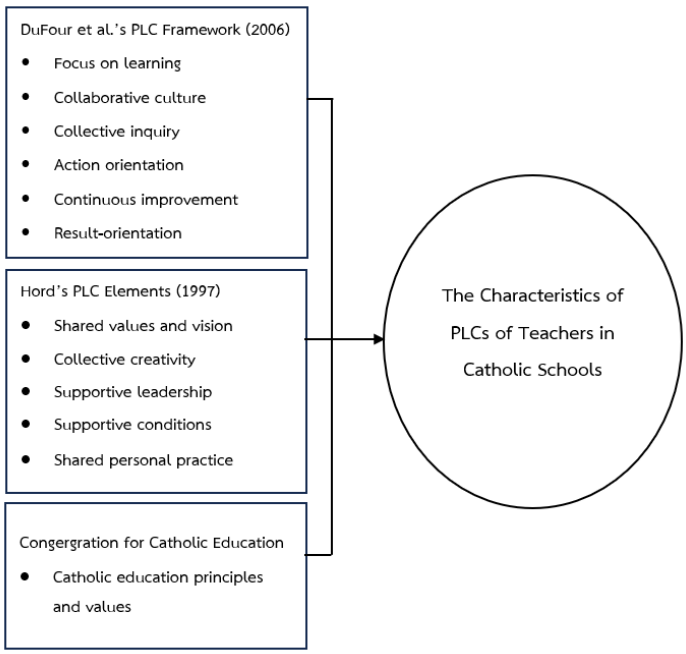



**Figure 1** *Conceptual framework of the study*

This model shows that effective PLCs in Catholic schools need to combine strong support systems, teamwork, and faith-based educational goals. When these elements work together, schools can support both teachers' professional growth and students' holistic development.

## Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically using content analysis, to explore the characteristics of PLCs in Catholic schools. This approach was chosen for its capacity to uncover rich patterns, themes, and meanings within text-based data (Krippendorff, 2013).

### Research Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used to select documents that were highly relevant to the study's objectives. The sources included scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, reports, and official Church documents focusing on Catholic education, teacher collaboration, and teacher development. The sample was designed to capture diverse perspectives within Catholic and related educational contexts, thereby ensuring comprehensive coverage of PLC characteristics (Creswell, 2013).

The selected documents spanned from 1965 to 2022 and included a variety of scopes and types. They addressed major themes such as Thai educational reform that fostered the development of PLCs in schools, Catholic schooling, the theory and practice of PLCs, leadership that promoted PLCs, and empirical studies on PLC implementation.

This wide-ranging collection ensured that the content analysis was grounded in both foundational principles and contemporary research, offering a coherent and comprehensive view of educational development across different contexts. Church documents provided the foundational framework for Catholic educational philosophy, while scholarly books and peer-reviewed articles contributed empirical and theoretical insights into PLCs. Dissertations and reports added contextual perspectives. Furthermore, the Church documents outlined the philosophical basis for collaboration, shared mission, and reflective practice, while PLC frameworks turned these values into practical mechanisms, such as shared purpose and collaborative teams. This integration ensured that the analysis was grounded in both Catholic values and effective professional learning practices, reinforcing the study's conceptual foundation.

### Research Instrument

A dendrogram served as the primary research instrument. This visual tool helped represent relationships among emerging themes identified through content analysis. By organizing themes hierarchically, the dendrogram facilitated clear visualization of how PLC characteristics cluster and relate to Catholic educational values.

### Data Collection

Data collection followed a structured, multi-stage process. First, keyword searches were conducted using terms related to PLC characteristics and collaborative teaching practices (e.g., "professional learning community," "shared vision and mission," "collaborative teams," "shared leadership," "PLCs in Catholic schools"). Searches were carried out in academic databases such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and ERIC through Assumption University. The dataset was further expanded through manual searches and snowball sampling, which identified additional sources cited in the initial documents. Inclusion criteria required that documents explicitly address PLC elements and practices, be published in reputable venues, and, where possible, pertain to Catholic educational contexts. Duplicates and irrelevant items were excluded.

This process yielded a total of 151 documents for analysis, ensuring a robust and relevant data set. As this study relied primarily on document analysis, it did not capture teachers' lived experiences or school-level practices. This limitation was acknowledged, as empirical methods such as surveys, interviews, or case studies could provide deeper practical insights into PLC implementation.

### Data Analysis

A qualitative content analysis was conducted following Krippendorff (2013) and guided by the research questions previously mentioned in this study.

Units of analysis consisted of phrases and paragraphs aligned with established PLC frameworks (Hord, 1997; DuFour et al., 2006) and Church teachings (CCE, 2002, 2007, 2013).

A coding scheme was constructed to categorize data into key themes, including collaborative practices, shared leadership, reflective inquiry, and communal mission. These codes were visually organized using dendrograms to illustrate interrelationships and their alignment with Catholic school values. The initial coding was conducted by the researcher, who generated themes and multiple subthemes guided by Hord's (1997) and DuFour's PLC frameworks (2006). To ensure reliability, five experts in PLCs, Catholic education, and qualitative research reviewed the coding. Consensus was reached through iterative discussions, and discrepancies were resolved collaboratively.

To systematize the findings, a thematic matrix was constructed, linking themes and subthemes to specific data excerpts. This allowed for comparative analysis across different source types and enhanced clarity in how themes aligned with the conceptual framework.

**Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability were reinforced through expert validation, as five scholars in the fields of PLCs, Catholic education, school leadership, and qualitative methods reviewed and refined the coding scheme. Triangulation across diverse document types, along with a transparent analytic process, further enhanced credibility. The experts' review and feedback resolved coding discrepancies, improving consistency and alignment with our research objectives.

This methodology clearly outlined how to identify the characteristics of PLCs. It also showed their link to the mission and values of Catholic education.

By using different types of documents, having experts validate the findings, and following thorough analysis steps, the study's conclusions are strong and reliable.

Overall, the steps of the content analysis are illustrated in Figure 2.

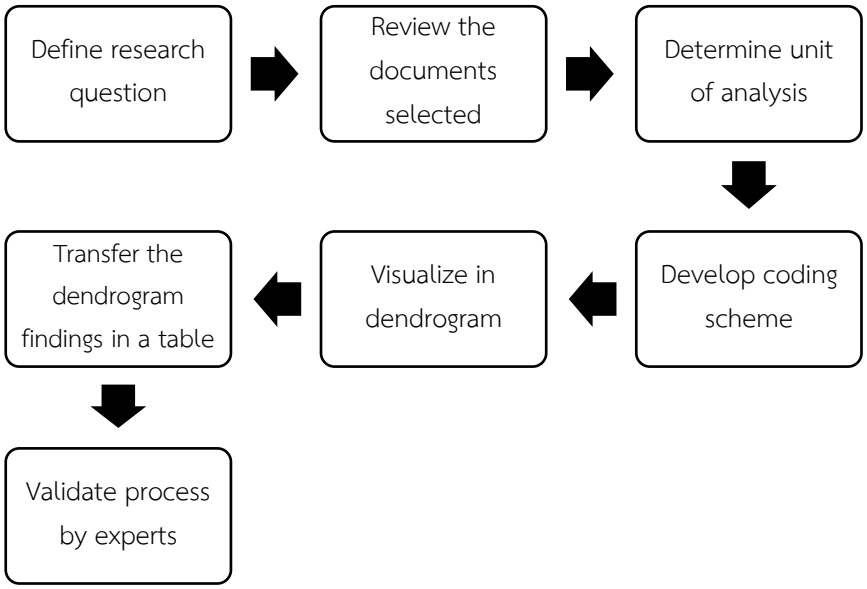



**Figure 2** *The steps of the content analysis*

## Results and Discussion

The content analysis of 151 documents revealed six key characteristics of PLCs in Catholic schools. These characteristics align closely with Catholic educational principles. They include shared purpose, collaborative teams, reflective collective learning, shared leadership, results-oriented learning, and supportive conditions (Wahyudhanti, 2024). Table 1 summarizes these findings and their subthemes.

**Table 1** *Findings obtained from the dendrogram visualization*

| Themes | Sub-themes | Sources |
|---|---|---|
| Shared purpose | Shared mission, vision, values and goals, shared beliefs, a focus on learning, a collective commitment to student learning, student achievement | Bolam et al. (2005); DuFour & Eaker (1998); DuFour et al. (2006); DuFour et al. (2008); DuFour & Fullan (2013); Eaker and Marzano (2020); Hord (1997); Hord (2004); Hord & Sommers (2008); Hargreaves & Fullan (2012); Senge et al. (2000); Sergiovanni (2006); Stoll et al. (2006); Catholic Education Association of Thailand (2014); Congregation for Catholic Education (2007, 2013, 2022); Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977) |

| Themes | Sub-themes | Sources |
|---|---|---|
| Collaborative teams | Collaborative teams, Collective efforts, interdependency, collaborative tasks, collaborative competencies, together addressing issues, embedded in daily teaching practices | Bolam et al. (2005); DuFour & Eaker (1998); DuFour et al. (2006); DuFour et al. (2008); DuFour & Fullan (2013); Eaker and Marzano (2020); Hord (1997); Hord (2004); Hord & Sommers (2008); Hargreaves & Fullan (2012); Sergiovanni (2006); Stoll et al. (2006); Zepeda (2012); Congregation for Catholic Education (2007, 2013) |
| Reflective collective learning | Enquiry, joint dialogue, open to ideas, peer observation, shared personal practice, offering feedback, respecting others' reflections, experimenting personal reflections, making adjustment | Bolam et al. (2005); DuFour & Eaker (1998); DuFour et al. (2006); DuFour et al. (2008); DuFour & Fullan (2013); Eaker and Marzano (2020); Hord (1997); Hord (2004); Hord & Sommers (2008); Senge et al. (2000); Zepeda (2012); Stoll et al. (2006); Congregation for Catholic Education (2014, 2022); |

| Themes | Sub-themes | Sources |
|---|---|---|
| Shared leadership | Delegating responsibility, shared leadership, involving teachers, building leadership capacity, leadership to promote learning, shared decision making, opportunities to initiate changes, teachers' rewards | Hord (1997); Hord (2004); Hord & Sommers (2008); Spillane (2006); Hallinger & Murphy (1985); Harris & Lambert (2003); Sergiovanni (2006); Congregation for Catholic Education (2007) |
| Result-oriented learning | Assessing student learning, analyzing results, identifying students' strengths and weaknesses, strategies for student learning, improving instructional practices, constructing formative assessments | Bolam et al. (2005); DuFour & Eaker (1998); DuFour et al. (2006); DuFour et al. (2008); DuFour & Fullan (2013); Eaker and Marzano (2020); Haris and Muijs (2005); Congregation for Catholic Education (2007, 2013, 2022); |

| Themes | Sub-themes | Sources |
|---|---|---|
| Supportive conditions: | Supportive conditions, resource availability, conditions for productivity | Hord (1997); Hord (2004); Hord & Sommer (2008); Kruse et al. (1995); Stoll et al. (2006); Hargreaves & Fullan (2012); Senge et al. (2000); Congregation for Catholic Education (2007, 2013, 2022); |
| Structures | Sufficient time for collaboration, regular meetings, reducing isolation, physical proximity, effective communication system, | |
| Collegiality | Collegial trustworthiness, mutual respect and trust, social activities, trust building, caring relationship, celebrating achievements | |
| Staff capacity | Staff development, job-embedded professional development, sufficient resource persons, sufficient financial resources, relevant cognitive knowledge and skills | |

Note: Wahyudhanti, T. R. (2024). A Model of Professional Learning Communities for Teachers in the Schools Administered by the Education Department of Bangkok Archdiocese (Unpublished proposal dissertation). Assumption University, Bangkok.

The six identified themes align with existing PLC frameworks and closely connect with Church documents. For example, the emphasis on a shared purpose reflects the Congregation for Catholic Education's emphasis on co-responsibility and shared mission (CCE, 2007). Similarly, the focus on collaboration corresponds with DuFour and Eaker's (1998) concept of interdependent professional practice. Furthermore, the importance of reflective collective learning resonates with Catholic education's emphasis on reflection and dialogue (CCE, 2013). Figure 3 illustrates how these themes are organized into six coherent domains, thereby reinforcing the validity of the results.

A Church document states that "teachers are called to work as a community of witnesses" (CCE, 2007), while DuFour et al. (2006) note that "collaborative cultures sustain continuous improvement." Moreover, a study in Thailand found that PLCs help teachers analyze data and adapt their instructional practices to enhance student achievement (Worapun et al., 2022).

Although most findings confirmed the expected PLC characteristics, some differences emerged. Church documents stressed shared mission and co-responsibility, whereas academic studies highlighted issues such as hierarchical decision-making (Koelsch, 2016) and unclear goal-setting (Madden, 2020). These challenges suggest that while the ideals of PLCs and Catholic education align, their practical implementation may be hindered by structural factors, particularly in Catholic schools in Thailand, where PLC development is ongoing.

## The Six Characteristics of PLCs in Catholic Schools

The six characteristics of PLCs identified are: shared purpose of student learning, collaborative teams for improved student achievement, reflective collective learning for enhanced professional practice, shared leadership for capacity building, results-oriented learning for sustained improvement, and supportive conditions including structures, collegiality, and staff capacity (Wahyudhanti, 2024). These features support Catholic schools in fulfilling their mission of holistic student development rooted in Catholic values.

### *Shared Purpose of Student Learning*

A shared purpose centered on student learning is fundamental to effective PLCs. Teachers commit to continuous improvement while pursuing shared goals that prioritize student success. A learning-focused goal fosters trust and collaboration (Hord, 1997; DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

In Catholic schools, education extends beyond academics to include moral and spiritual formation, as emphasized by the Catholic Education Council of Thailand (CECT) (2018). To achieve this mission, essential teacher competencies, such as supporting student learning and engaging with the community, are crucial (Mhunpiew & Asavisanu, 2022). Educators who align themselves with instructional goals and Catholic values enhance their professional identity and foster shared responsibility (Sergiovanni, 2006). Research indicates that teams with clearly defined learning goals collaborate more effectively and improve student achievement (Admiraal et al., 2021; Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006).

### *Collaborative Teams for Improved Student Achievement*

Collaboration is essential in promoting solidarity and the common good within Catholic education (CCE, 2007; Sergiovanni, 2006). Teachers work together to set goals, assess student performance, and adapt their teaching strategies, which enhances learning (DuFour et al., 2006).

This approach integrates faith with education, fostering instructional improvement and a strong Christian identity (Catholic Education Council of Thailand (CECT), 2018). Collaborative efforts include joint planning, reviewing student work, and providing constructive feedback, all of which support collective responsibility and continuous improvement (CCE, 2002, 2007).

When implemented effectively, collaboration nurtures teacher competencies and student outcomes (Mhunpiew & Asavisanu, 2022). PLCs formalize these processes by creating structures and cultures that support shared practices and the integration of faith (Koelsch, 2016).

### *Reflective Collective Learning for Better Professional Practices*

Reflective collective learning involves practices such as peer dialogue, observations, and lesson reviews (Stoll et al., 2006; Hord, 1997). These practices foster critical reflection and facilitate instructional adjustments. They also enable teachers to provide open feedback and contribute to building collective knowledge (Hord, 1997, 2004). Personal reflections encourage experimentation and promote professional growth (Timperley, 2011). Over time, reflective learning has become an integral part of professional culture (Balta et al., 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

In Catholic schools, reflection is closely tied to dialogue and discernment based on Catholic values (CCE, 2022; CECT, 2018). Teachers are encouraged to engage in structured reflection, which supports their professional

growth and integrates the values into their teaching practices. This process is reinforced by competencies such as "becoming a better teacher every day," emphasizing ongoing renewal (Mhunpiew & Asavisanu, 2022).

### Shared Leadership for Capacity Building

Shared leadership empowers teachers to engage in decision-making and enhance instructional practices (Leithwood et al., 2019). This approach fosters ownership, professionalism, and accountability while diminishing the reliance on hierarchical structures.

A Catholic identity reinforces this model by urging teachers and leaders to act as missionary disciples who embody Gospel values and share responsibility for the school's growth (CECT, 2018). Every teacher plays a vital role in professional learning, which strengthens leadership capacity in Catholic schools (Mhunpiew & Asavisanu, 2022). Leadership founded on communal responsibility supports data-informed strategies and promotes teacher development (Rufus, 2023). Additionally, recognizing and encouraging innovation sustains ongoing improvement (Harris & Muijs, 2005; Zepeda, 2012), aligning with the Church’s vision of a shared mission and collective effort (Beltramo et al., 2021).

### Results-oriented Learning for Sustained Improvement

Results-oriented learning enhances school improvement through data analysis and reflective teaching (Antinluoma et al., 2021). Collaborative reflection on assessments helps monitor progress and adjust instruction (DuFour et al., 2006; Madden, 2020).

In Catholic education, data serves not only for accountability but also as a tool for dialogue that fosters holistic growth (CECT, 2018). Teachers must

possess assessment literacy and provide effective feedback to enhance learning (Mhunpiew & Asavisanu, 2022). Data-informed teaching must strike a balance between measurable outcomes and moral and spiritual development. As a result, effective PLCs require collaboration time, data access, and training, supported by leadership that promotes accountability (Schildkamp, 2019).

**Supportive Conditions: Structures, Collegiality, and Staff Capacity**

Supportive conditions in Catholic schools, including structures, collegiality, and staff capacity, collectively foster a learning environment that supports the achievement of the school's mission (Hord, 1997; Stoll et al., 2006).

In terms of structures, scheduled collaboration time helps reduce feelings of isolation among staff and promotes open dialogue (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Vescio et al., 2008). Effective communication and physical proximity facilitate the flow of information (CCE, 2017).

Collegiality is built on trust and the accessibility of leadership. Leaders actively engage with teachers and celebrate their successes (CCE, 2022; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Additionally, social activities help reinforce the collaborative spirit within the school community (CCE, 2022).

Staff capacity is enhanced through job-embedded professional development that focuses on both technical and relational skills. Evaluation systems that prioritize competence and relational growth support continuous learning and adaptability (Balta et al., 2023; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Teachers should apply new insights directly to their practices to improve the quality of instruction.

The characteristics of PLCs in Catholic schools are illustrated in Figure 3 below.

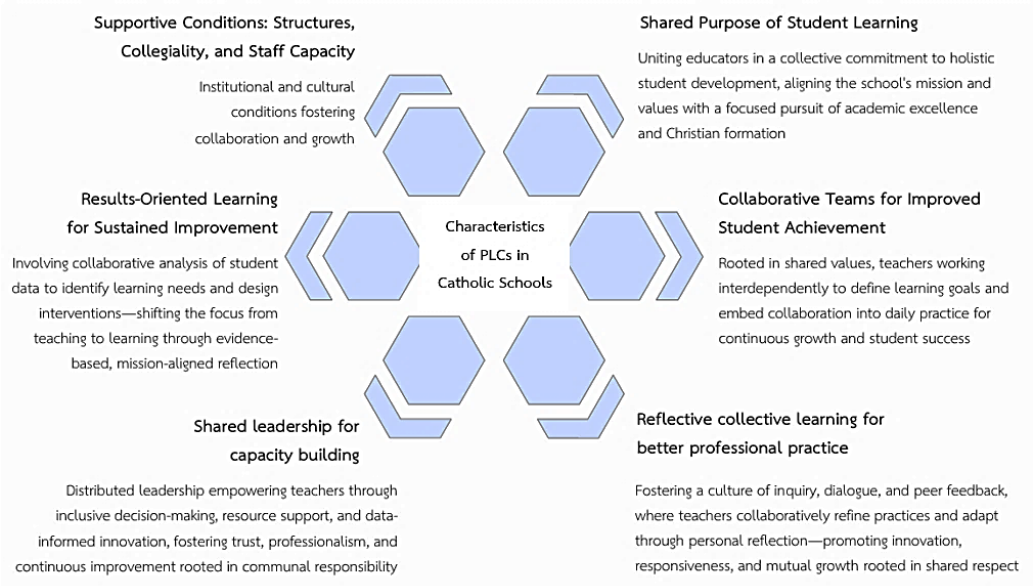



**Figure 3** *Characteristics of PLCs in Catholic Schools*

**Implications of the PLC Characteristics for Teacher Professional Development in Catholic schools**

The six characteristics of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) provide an effective framework for professional development in Catholic schools, particularly those under the EDBA, where renewal of Catholic identity and holistic teacher formation are ongoing priorities (CECT, 2018).

Firstly, integrating PLCs into daily school life boosts professional development through shared responsibility and reflective dialogue. Structured discussions on student data and collaborative lesson planning help teachers enhance their instructional practices and accountability (Anchunda, 2021; Zepeda, 2012). Evidence from Thai Catholic schools shows that professional development programs improve teacher competency in collaboration and community engagement (Mhunpiew & Asavisanu, 2022).

Secondly, PLCs facilitate data-informed instruction. By analyzing student learning evidence together, teachers can adjust strategies to meet diverse needs

and promote evidence-based decision-making (Schildkamp, 2019; Antinluoma et al., 2021). When this occurs in a trusting culture—through peer observations and feedback—professional growth becomes sustainable and mission-focused (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Stoll et al., 2006).

Thirdly, effective leadership is crucial for sustaining PLCs. Leaders must provide time, resources, and emotional support while fostering teachers' interpersonal skills (CCE, 2017, 2022). This approach promotes collaboration over hierarchy and encourages shared responsibility for professional improvement (Miller et al., 2022; Beltramo et al., 2021).

In the EDBA context, these characteristics address challenges such as hierarchical decision-making and limited collaboration (Koelsch, 2016; Miller et al., 2022). concerns also highlighted in national Catholic education reviews, which called for stronger teacher development, collaborative practices, and clarity of Catholic identity (CECT, 2018).

A shared purpose rooted in Catholic values strengthens instructional coherence and spiritual formation (Education Department of Bangkok Archdiocese (EDBA), 2012). Inter-school lesson study groups further enhance teacher networking by allowing smaller schools to benefit from the expertise of larger ones (Worapun et al., 2022).

Incorporating the Ignatian Pedagogy Paradigm (IPP) into PLC meetings fosters professional development by cultivating teachers' reflective competencies. The IPP cycle—Context, Experience, Reflection, Action, and Evaluation—provides a structured process that transforms collaboration into sustained opportunities for professional and spiritual renewal (Jesuit Schools Network of North America, 2015).

Lastly, supportive conditions at both school and diocesan levels are essential. Initiatives like scheduled collaboration, joint retreats, and workshops

foster trust among teachers and align professional development with the Catholic mission of holistic student growth (CCE, 2017; EDBA, 2012). These efforts also address competency gaps in Catholic schools in Thailand, enhancing teacher collaboration and faith integration in pedagogy (Mhunpiew & Asavisanu, 2022).

## Conclusion and Recommendation

This study identified six characteristics of PLCs in Catholic schools: shared purpose of student learning, collaborative teams for improved achievement, reflective collective learning for better professional practice, shared leadership for capacity building, results-oriented learning for sustained improvement, and supportive conditions, including structures, collegiality, and staff capacity. These features align closely with Catholic educational values, which aim to achieve the holistic development of student rooted in Christian principles.

The originality of this research lies in its systematic integration of PLC frameworks with Catholic educational principles through qualitative document analysis. This framework outlines how PLCs can enhance teacher development while promoting Catholic identity. This contribution enriches the broader academic discourse on teacher development, particularly in Catholic school settings.

For practical application, especially within the EDBA schools, school leaders can enhance professional development by integrating PLC routines into diocesan programs. Additionally, they should allocate time for collaborative work and implement shared protocols for lesson study, reflection, and peer feedback. Additionally, inter-school collaboration, particularly between larger and smaller schools, can help distribute resources and expertise equitably.

Integrating the IPP into PLC practices provides a structured cycle of context, reflection, action, and evaluation, linking professional learning to Catholic formation.

However, the findings also highlight challenges, such as hierarchical leadership and time constraints, that hinder the effective implementation of PLCs. Additionally, this study's qualitative design and reliance on document analysis limit its ability to provide empirical evidence of impact. Future research should quantitatively examine how school community members, particularly teachers, perceive the characteristics of PLCs. It should also evaluate their effects on teacher practices and student outcomes, while exploring strategies to overcome organizational barriers.

Overall, PLCs offer a mission-driven framework that unites academic excellence with the Church’s educational goals.

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