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Professional Learning and Adult Learning Theory: A Connection

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This study documents and interprets teachers' experience in a two-year professional development provincial initiative called Changing Results for Young Readers in western Canada. The interviews of a group of teachers in a rural school district were examined in order to understand how the participants' learning experiences were connected to adult learning theory. Themes emerged in teachers' changes of assumptions, expectations, values and beliefs about their identity as a teacher. These findings have implications for understanding how professional development opportunities can be structured and facilitated to support the complex role of a teacher.

Keywords: Adult Learning, Professional Learning, Teacher Development

Introduction

Professional development for teachers in British Columbia (and within Canada) has traditionally revolved around a facilitated session by an expert in a specific field. With continual research (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Mitchell & Sackney, 2011), the educational community is beginning to realize a change of focus is needed in order to fully utilize our greatest assets within our schools – our teachers. Changing Results for Young Readers is a provincial initiative that relies on a framework of continual professional development for teachers to meet the needs of their early readers who are struggling with the formation of their reading processing system (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). The teachers participate in collaborative inquiry and choose a research question they will focus on throughout a year-long process, or perhaps longer. The professional learning involves knowledge for practice, knowledge in practice, knowledge of practice and knowledge of self (Cochran-Smith & Lyle, 2001).

The framework of Changing Results for Young Readers (CR4YR) is developed after a professional learning community (PLC) model which has gained popularity recently and has impact on teaching practice (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008). Much has been written about PLCs (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hord, Roussin & Sommers, 2010; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009a, 2011) and their effectiveness (Vescio et al, 2008). However, there has been little research conducted on the connection between PLCs and the type of learning teachers are experiencing through their participation in this model of professional learning. I focus on term transformative learning, which is connected to adult learning theory (Mezirow, 2000), in order to provide a framework for a specific kind of learning educators may experience in a professional learning

community. In this study, I examine research findings on teachers' learning in professional learning communities to answer the following questions:

- In what ways do teachers experience transformative learning as a result of participation in a PLC?
- What aspects of PLCs enhanced the likelihood of transformative change for the participants?

I begin with an explanation of this type of learning in the context of professional learning for teachers by referring to literature on PLCs, adult learning theory and an in-depth description of transformative learning theory. Furthermore, I situate this study with the theoretical literature within aspects of adult learning theory, professional learning and professional learning communities. I conclude with a discussion about diverse perspectives and critical reflection and how those concepts emerged from this study as positive indicators for transformative learning.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Transformation learning theory is defined by Mezirow (2000) as: “becoming critically aware of one’s own tacit assumptions and expectations and those of others and assessing their relevance for making an interpretation” (p. 4). For the purposes of this article, I will draw upon this definition. I chose transformative learning as a focus due to the specific definition of transformative learning and the ability to seek out instances of this kind of learning through participant’s descriptions. Learning that adds information onto existing knowledge does not necessarily challenge the participant to interact with the knowledge in a way that challenges previous assumptions or creates new meanings (Timperley, 2011). A frame of reference can be described as a meaning perspective in the area of assumptions, expectations, values or beliefs, which may result in a specific interpretation of an experience (Mezirow, 2000).

Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning community (PLC) is a common term used to describe many collective learning opportunities happening in schools over the past two decades (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhenak, 2004; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hord et al, 2010; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009a, 2011; Stoll et al, 2006). Due to the popularity of the concept of PLCs, many schools believe they are ‘doing’ a PLC when they gather and discuss students’ needs or participate in discussions about what is happening in their classrooms (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009b). When schools gather teachers together and explain it is their *collaboration time*, teachers do not necessarily know how to collaborate and for what purpose. PLCs need to be developed organically to fit the needs of each individual school culture; therefore, no two PLCs will look the same. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), a PLC “should be neither inconsequential talking shops nor a statistical world of scores and spreadsheets that take on a life of their own, far removed from real students. PLCs should be places where focused conversations and inquiries...lead to improvements” (p. 163). Hord et al. (2010) describe a PLC as a school culture that enhances teacher quality through “intentional, collegial instruction of all educators for the purpose of promoting student learning” (p. viii). Although the definitions orient slightly differently, the majority of authors on the subject of PLCs agree that the foundational purpose for recommending the implementation and maintenance of PLCs always remains the same: to enhance student learning (DuFour et al., 2004; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hord et al, 2010; Mitchell & Sackney, 2009a, 2009b, 2011; Sergiovanni, 1994; Stoll & Seashore, 2007).

Characteristics of Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory was formalized by Knowles (1978) and was developed into a method and practice of teaching adult learners called andragogy. Knowles' writing is based on the historical work of Eduard Lindeman (1926) who believed learning was a life-long goal and should be understood at the adult level in order to foster desire to learn on a continual basis throughout all stages of life. He states, "If learning is to be revived, quickened so as to become once more an adventure, we shall have need of new concepts, new motives, new methods; we shall need to experiment with the qualitative aspects of education" (p. 5). Knowles (1978) picked up his research where Lindeman left off and began to focus on how adults were successful with life-long learning habits and what connections could be made about learning theories. Knowles based his theory of adult learning on Lindeman's (1926) main concepts: a) adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs that learning will satisfy; b) learning is self-centered through life situations; c) experience is the richest resource; d) adults have a deep need to be self-directing; and e) adult learners need individualized learning.

Characteristics of Transformative Learning Theory

Mezirow (2000) researched adult learning theory and concluded there was an aspect to the theory the other researchers had not accounted for – transformative learning. Basically, he determined that reflecting on knowledge would have the desired effect of future action, based on the intentional and incidental learning that happened when working within the perimeters of adult learning theory. Mezirow understood that learning could occur from the elaboration of existing knowledge or the input of new knowledge, but he determined that when knowledge is completely changed, a significant transformation has occurred for the learner that may result in a completely different perspective of an experience. This was an important development in adult learning theory because it significantly altered our understanding of deep learning that may occur later in life when assumptions, beliefs and values are more in-grained and solidified through a lifetime of reinforcement. For example, if someone encounters a different epistemological belief about how knowledge is created, they may dismiss it because it does not fit into their existing belief system, or they may consider it and look for affirmation of truth by examining experiences and reflecting on their own belief system for validity. Once someone critically reflects on their own frame of reference, reinforcing information may come through experiences or social learning situations that may strengthen their position. Many other researchers have built on the theory of transformative learning in different contexts and from different perspectives ranging from a practical context (Merriam & Bierema, 2014) to an emotional context (Dirkx, 2006) to a spiritual context (Cranton, 2006) of transformative learning.

By questioning their own beliefs, assumptions and perspectives, adult learners may allow a change in thinking over a period of time (Cranton, 2006). According to Merriam and Bierema (2014), transformative learning is a learning process of making meaning of one's experience. An experience can cause people to examine how they think about something. A person may question their assumptions and go through a reflective process, which may lead to a perspective transformation. Transformative learning happens when people "critically examine their habitual expectations, revise them, and act on the revised point of view" (Cranton, 2006, p. 19). For example, in an adult learning situation transformative learning may look like a constant movement from collegial discussions about an assumption about how students learn and an individual critical reflection on how one interprets the discussion on a personal level – in what

ways does the individual teacher currently agree with the assumption discussed collectively and in what ways does the information challenge her own assumptions and beliefs, and finally, how will the individual interpret the learning experience to impact his or her own learning? Brookfield (1986) writes about the necessity to change perspectives and shift paradigms in order to interpret the world differently, which may be the case when a person undergoes a significant event that alters their sense of self in some way. Dirkx (2006) argues that transformative learning incorporates aspects of experiential, holistic, and embodied learning. Emotional dynamics in learning are evoked due to the very concept of learning, which involves putting oneself in an unknown situation that is new and may alter beliefs and assumptions in some way (Dirkx, 2006).

Mezirow (2000) describes the basic principle of transformative learning as referring to transforming a problematic “frame of reference and making it more dependable” in life by critically reflecting on interpretations (p. 20). By focusing on thoughtful experiences which teachers are genuinely concerned about and trying to gain different perspectives on, professional development experiences may actually inspire novelty and mindfulness through the nature of thoughtful discussions. This type of professional development, according to Brookfield (1986) cannot follow a recipe approach to planning and implementation because no one can predict how an individual or a group will respond to new ideas or interpretations. All participants in the experience will need to adopt flexibility and be open to the emotional dynamics that may be evoked due to the very concept of learning (Dirkx, 2006).

Frames of Reference

According to adult learning theory, learning takes place when one elaborates existing frames of reference and/or learns new frames of reference. Transformative learning takes place when one transforms frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow describes frame of reference as being a meaning perspective in the areas of assumptions, expectations, values and beliefs resulting in the ways of interpreting experience. This may happen within or outside one’s awareness. For instance, during a collegial conversation I observed a teacher describing her expectation of early reading behaviour of the students in her class. During the discussion, another teacher became visibly uncomfortable (red face, pinched mouth, raised shoulders) and when there was a break in the conversation she explained that her expectations of her students were individualized and she did not believe it was possible to have a blanket set of expectations that were the same for all her students. A spirited discussion ensued. Each teacher involved was asked to explain her reasoning and belief system regarding expectations. The teachers realized they were debating the difference between individualized and standardized expectations. What began as a heated discussion eventually became a discussion full of questions and listening to opinions of others. During the next week, the questions and critical reflection continued and the teachers used many opportunities to discuss this difference in expectation with each other. These complex webs of meaning act as a filter through how we see ourselves and the world; although, they may become heightened when we encounter new or different perspectives (Cranton, 2000). Thus, transformative learning often occurs in a social learning situation and can be highly emotional due to the feelings connected to reframing one’s knowledge. Adults may undergo transformative learning when they critically reflect on knowing how they know, which involves a heightened sense of awareness of the context and the ability to embrace uncertainty of their own generalized or specific assumptions. Due to the sensitive emotional experience connected to transformative learning, a degree of vulnerability is necessary in the participants described in this study. Many participants may not allow that level of vulnerability to overtake them during a

research study, and therefore, the observed instances may not reflect the degree to which the participants experienced transformative learning.

Methods

I designed this study to focus on qualitative research because it provides an understanding of people's own accounts of their behaviour (Richards & Morse, 2013). According to Wilson (1979), qualitative research provides "a sufficiently comprehensive amount of outcome and how-to information that someone interested in undertaking a similar project can make that decision wisely and get specific help in how to go about it" (p. 446). In order to gain a thick and rich description of the experiences of the educators as they engage in professional learning collectively, I used a case study method (Merriam, 1998).

Participant Selection

Participants were selected to take part in this qualitative research through an open invitation sent out to all the educators involved in the Changing Results for Young Readers collaborative inquiry in the first year of the study. In total, year one consisted of eight participants and year two consisted of the same eight participants. The participants were all elementary classroom teachers or literacy intervention teachers who have worked in the district for 5-30 years. They were all female and have at least a bachelor degree up to a master's degree in education. This study is based on the first two years of interview data collected between 2012-2014. This study is part of a larger, longitudinal study over a period of four years.

Data Collection and Analysis

A combination of semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and observational field notes were used to capture the participants' evolving knowledge, experiences or feelings connected to the participation in the PLC. Trustworthiness was ensured by my detailed account of each step in my study progression, data collection, data analysis and my ability to account for the outcome of the study (Richards & Morse, 2013). My reflective research journal is the prime source of my justification of the study's trustworthiness (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Richards & Morse, 2013). The transcribed interviews were analyzed as an iterative process of coding, categorizing, and abstracting data as outlined in research for conducting qualitative, interpretive research (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 1990). I then analyzed and coded the data at a level of comparison, evaluating the richness of the fit of frames of reference (assumptions, expectations, values and beliefs) across the transcripts. I use pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the participants. In the following section, I describe these themes and provide a discussion of our findings.

Findings

Change of Assumptions

A transformation of assumptions involves a generalized thought or understanding being reframed to adapt the generalization. Many of the participants gave examples of changes in their assumptions regarding how they perceived other teachers' competence level in many different situations. The participants spoke about their uncertainty of their own practice because they do not have the opportunity, in normal circumstances, to discuss pedagogy and teach collaboratively with other teachers. There was an overwhelming sense that each teacher had their own struggles in the classroom and that the other teachers did not share those struggles. For example, Lita

commented that, “being able to see yeah, these teachers are struggling with this too, and that makes me feel like it’s not so bad.” She continued to describe a more significant benefit as she stated,

these teachers are master teachers in many, many ways and it was just such growth in hearing their ideas and what worked and what didn’t work. I mean, you really felt like you were in the same place as some of them, oh that didn’t work for that person or they’re struggling with this, I don’t have to feel bad I’m struggling with that bit too. And it was a [collective] greater mind to come up with some of these problems or work out solutions.

And Lynn explained, “even when others were having troubles in their class that was kind of nice to know that you’re not the only one having troubles.” These participants described valuing the opportunity to share their practice and their struggles with other teachers through the PLC in order to dispel those assumptions and support each other through their struggles.

Participants continued to describe why they were hesitant to share their practice with others and enter into a relational space that could allow for vulnerability. They described a fear of judgment from their colleagues that would break down collegial relationships rather than build up interdependence within the PLC. Lynn explained,

I think people allowed themselves to be more vulnerable and share out, they weren’t so reserved about sharing out things, there wasn’t that feeling of I’m going to be judged because I’m not doing this, it’s sort of like going, okay I think I’m doing this wrong or I’m missing something ... but I don’t think people were that worried.

In addition, Lerae mentioned the collective comfort level of the group increasing half way throughout the first year of the PLC as she stated,

perhaps by the fourth month I felt okay about saying, I didn’t get that or, hey guys have you ever experienced this in your classrooms before? Without being judged by my peers, has anyone had this experience before and by the fourth month I felt more comfortable doing that and no one heckled me or rolled their eyes at me when I did that.

Ann echoed Lerae’s statement about the lack of judgment that is needed in order to have a safe environment for members of the PLC to speak up honestly about what is happening in their classrooms. She said,

usually I’m resistant to share, not because I don’t want to share what I’m doing but because I’m nervous of being judged, I guess, but in a safe environment it’s a little easier because no one is going to say, “that’s a terrible idea,” or “wow, you’re a really bad teacher.

In another interview, Coral described her thoughts on the comfort level within the group after a number of sessions. She explained,

I didn’t find it judgmental at all, like even when someone asked for help for something, people would sort of throw out answers or possible answers and you could just try them

or not try them, but you never felt like someone was thinking you weren't doing your job right.

Change of Expectations

By using the frames of reference as a way of analyzing transformative learning experiences, I found that there were examples of transformation of expectations. Often the changes were based on the interactions, or the expectations of interactions, of the members of the PLC. Due to the lack of experience with this type of professional learning, participants described what they expected to do in a PLC and how the reality of the learning environment was much different. For instance, Coral explained,

Well, at first I didn't have great hopes, if you asked me to participate and I kind of understood it, I probably would have said no. But about the third session I really started to see a change and it wasn't just, oh let's complain about your jobs, it was how can we help each other, how can we share and support each other? So from the third [session] on, I was gung ho because ... there was a period where people had to feel comfortable with each other and everybody just sort of sat there and we didn't really know why we were there. And then after that, it just opened up and it really ... was very collaborative.

Through a similar conversation, Kristy spoke about the evolution of the sessions and described the last session of the first year of participating within the PLC. She explained,

I think the last day was our best day. I think just over time everyone got more comfortable, more open, more relaxed, more willing to share and less fear of being judged. And our last session I just thought was beautiful, like everybody, it was just, like this open community of people sharing thoughts and ideas without fear. And, I thought it was pretty special.

Lita described her experience with change of expectations around her own sense of responsibility and commitment to her colleagues through the PLC. She explained,

There is such wealth in that group of people and I would not have known that, and I wouldn't have been able to stretch my thinking. If this person is having some difficulty with that ... I felt like I needed to take some responsibility to come up with some different answers and some different strategies for them and that just helped me grow as well so it was a commitment to each other.

The participants' comments focused on their previous expectation of what professional learning was, before beginning their participation in the PLC, and their sense of community afterwards. The interactions that happened throughout the PLC session seemed to surprise the participants who explained they usually worked and learned in isolation, without considering other teachers as a source of expertise.

Change of Values

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that the participants valued other members of the PLC as friends, colleagues and sources of support; however, there seemed to be a shift in their

acknowledgement in other participants as sources of expertise. Many of the participants worked together for many years and developed close friendships. The PLC was an opportunity to focus on the value of the other teachers as significant experts who have years of experience in the classroom. Joan described her change of understanding when she stated,

I find that if you don't talk with other people sometimes you tend to just go down your own track and you're not as reflective as you could be or you're struggling to find new ideas and if you meet with other people you get you get a lot more, new ideas and my thinking changed a bit at times, where I would think that would be just a totally wrong thing to do, if I was just by myself, but when I talked to other people they made me see that oh, I should really try this and I did and it worked.

Lynn described the benefits of working collaboratively with colleagues through the PLC as she explained,

If there were any troubles in my class whether it's behaviour or related to reading or writing and just having that time to talk with other professionals ... and knowing that I could go to someone when I had troubles.

Lerae explained why teachers inherently tend to see professionals 'outside' the walls of a school as experts, while overlooking 'in house' experts. She described her experience by maintaining,

There are so many talented people in that group, it's like wow, this is great because as you know, we tend to be in our classrooms, alone in our classrooms all day and it's so great to get the opportunity to share ideas, and that sharing was great.

The time together to discuss pedagogy was seen as a value, as well as the teachers who were a source of expertise; consequently, the conversations did not just happen in the PLC sessions but spilled over into everyday school life. As collective learning through the PLC became more prevalent and people felt it was a safe environment to discuss practice, more people were opening their doors to colleagues in the PLC to co-teach or work collaboratively in the classroom setting. Kristy explained,

I really liked it here because Margaret was really trying new things in her room which, it's exciting when someone you know well [gets] really excited about it and then it was really fun for me to go in and see when she had things laid out and the process, so what worked and what didn't work and then how it was modified. And then, we also have Sally here who is amazing. I want to take a pro-d day and just watch what she's doing in there because she has it working beautifully.

Change of Beliefs

Changes in self-efficacy and collective efficacy were evident through the conversations with the PLC participants. The combination of theory introduced through the CR4YR initiative and the time and space for the sharing of knowledge by the members of the PLC allowed for a sense of efficacy to permeate through the group. Teachers began to question or affirm their practice, in relation to others' experiences or new theoretical knowledge, and make decisions

based on the sense that they were making a difference in the lives of their students. Lita explained,

It just opened up an ability to look at how other kids were doing across the district, especially some of the classes that were similar to ours and often if ... you're looking at a class that is doing work at a higher level you think, maybe I'm not doing that right or maybe I need to pull my kids along faster whereas, what you're hearing at this meeting is really do a good, solid job, other kids are having difficulty there and don't try to rush too fast. So I think it gave us permission to just kind of see our kids where they are at and really try to do a good job of bringing them along from there.

Coral described a sense of collective efficacy built between her and her literacy intervention teacher as they both considered her students and how to improve their reading abilities. She maintained,

I think it also helped that Molly ... [worked with] my children that were having difficulties, we took as our problem, both of us took our problem, the parts that we had as our problems to share in the class. It wasn't just my side, it was her side, I just felt that it wasn't just me frustrated. I felt that it was something more than just one of us ... and we were able to take that to the PLC and sort of discuss and talk about how that was impacting their learning and our teaching.

Ann described how participating in the PLC influenced her students' learning. She explained,

Sometimes you feel stuck when you are in your classroom and you are dealing with the same things all the time and then when you get an idea, or just something helpful, or even just some encouragement, then you don't feel so stuck. You can look at the slow progress you might be making that you didn't notice before. So, for them specifically, it's kind of helping them to move and to show them that they are making progress because sometimes they get discouraged too, right? 'I'll never read or I can't do it,' so if you are seeing that positive side then they are too.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer some insight into the type of learning teachers are describing as experienced through their participation in a PLC. This article offers a tentative answer to the question, in what ways do teachers experience transformative learning as a result of participation in a PLC? Through my data analysis I interpreted a variety of instances which teachers experienced a transformation of a frame of reference—assumptions, expectations, values and beliefs—the results show that PLCs may offer the framework for transformative learning to become a reality. To summarize the findings of this study in regards to my initial question: (1) participants experienced transformative learning when they encountered diverse perspectives through dialoging with colleagues about issues in education that were personally meaningful and important to their role as a teacher and their practice; (2) critical reflection was necessary for participants to question their frames of reference. In the following section I will address the second question presented in this study, what aspects of the PLCs enhanced the likelihood of transformative change for the participants?

Aspects of PLCs Connected to Transformative Learning

My focus in this study has been to analyze participants' experiences in PLCs to understand from my interpretation the extent to which participants are experiencing transformative kind of learning and how that is actualized in the framework of a PLC. Focusing on transformative learning is significant because it opens the academic conversation up to how teachers are experiencing learning in PLCs. To better understand teachers' professional learning may lead to further commitment and intended value placed on providing teachers with the time and space to critically reflect and benefit from interaction with people of diverse opinions. This study is limited by the examination of only a single, longitudinal case study, although the purpose of focusing on case studies was to obtain a rich, detailed description from which to extrapolate occurrences of transformative learning. Limitations in this study are apparent in the relationship built between myself as a facilitator/researcher and the participants due to the multiple roles I have and continue to experience during the course of the study. Researcher subjectivity and potential bias regarding my own participation in the study are limitations. Although the trusting relationship may allow participants to further disclose during the interviews; conversely, the relationship may distort the information the participants chose to share. Another limitation of this study is the small number of participants. Therefore, the findings that emerge from this study will be context specific to this group of participants in this particular PLC. Given the limitations of this review, I am confident suggesting that there is connection between transformative learning and PLCs. The connection is demonstrated by the value and importance placed on diverse perspectives and critical reflection, which is derived from the outcome of my review. I will further connect the concept of diverse perspectives and critical reflection to the theoretical literature and to specific examples within the studies.

Diverse Perspectives

The diversity of perspectives can either been seen as a hindrance in a learning community that values consensus and conformity, or as a benefit to a learning community that considers the significance of taking risks to genuinely understand and appreciate others' opinions and knowledge. Throughout the participants' experiences in this study the most prominent connection to transformative kind of learning happened when they recognized and honoured the different voices of the members. A PLC based on trust and respect is necessary for participants to feel safe enough to express different perspectives without the fear of judgment. Many of the participants stated that the trusting environment provided the space for them to take risks when expressing their individuality and recognize that there is more than one pedagogical approach. The participants used the PLC environment as a safe place to test out their differing assumptions or expectations with the knowledge that there was a significant benefit to understanding others' perspectives.

Often a disturbance in the education system or within a school actually invites people to come together and solve problems or consider challenges by creating the space to understand others' perspectives. Timperley (2011) explains that solving problems that are entrenched in the education system requires transformative, not additive, change to teaching practice. Additive change refers to learning that entails adding on information or knowledge to existing knowledge, rather than interacting with knowledge in a way that challenges previously held assumptions and creates new meanings (Timperley, 2011). Conversations with colleagues allows for teachers to be introduced to new perspectives that may lead to transformational learning if there is a level of trust and respect within the PLC. When there is a level of respect and admiration for the other

members of the PLC, each member is invited to present opinions and perspectives which supply the collective profession with a wealth of experience and knowledge coming from teachers with varying levels of education and experience, but a heightened level of expertise. It is a positive environment when teachers are given the freedom to challenge each other's thoughts and behaviour in a safe space. This type of collaboration can encourage flexibility in thinking, openness to new information, trust, risk-taking behaviour and thoughtful adaptability. The introduction of different perspectives into collegial conversations promotes a mindful attention and allows for further transformational growth (Dirkx, 2006).

Furthermore, being present in a collegial conversation can challenge and push the thinking of others through mindfully adhering to others' assumptions, expectations, beliefs and values. Brookfield (1986) states that having collegial conversations about diverse perspectives with others fosters engagement. He continues to argue "the extent to which adults are engaged in a free exchange of ideas, beliefs, and practices is one gauge of whether a society is open, democratic and healthy" (p.1).

Interestingly, the participants in this study only reported a honouring of diverse perspectives, not a disregard. Based on that information, it can be interpreted that there may be a connection between the value of diverse perspectives and the heightened possibility of transformational kind of learning to happen. Brookfield (1986) reiterates the necessity to change perspectives and shift paradigms in order to interpret the world differently, which may be the case when a person considers others' viewpoints. Perhaps learning with others is a key component in breaking people of their own automaticity (Langer, 1989). Participants were open to taking risks with their ideas, experiences and relationships in order to develop a framework based on trust and innovation.

Critical Reflection

Reflection allows information to settle into the individual while they re-evaluate current understandings and beliefs to make sense of experiences. It can be understood as an internal process that is necessary to sift through knowledge and assumptions to clarify beliefs and perhaps transform meanings (Timperley, 2011). Reflection can be incidental and unintentional, perhaps what someone does when they have a few contemplative moments to themselves; or it may be focused and deliberate when an experience happens and someone wants or needs to make sense of it. According to Jordi (2011), "reflection is predominantly conceptualized as the rational analytical process through which human beings extract knowledge from their experience" (p. 181). Critical reflection can facilitate dialogue between our experience and the conceptual aspects of our consciousness. Learning requires a significant amount of critical reflection, which is deliberate and purposeful. Consider the participants in this study who re-evaluated their own roles as teachers and re-framed their identity as members of a PLC who shared expertise and increased self and collective efficacy. It was necessary for the teachers to reflect on their current beliefs and understandings in order for them to question the validity of their perceptions. Sometimes critical reflection is prompted by conversations between teachers (Shulman & Sherin, 2004), and sometimes it is prompted by experience (Levine & Marcus, 2007). Regardless, the necessity of some kind of disturbance is required (Frankham & Howes, 2006) for someone to critically examine his or her own assumptions, expectations, beliefs and values.

The dichotomy between theory and practice is a well-documented complaint within the educational community (Given, 2010; Lieberman & Mace, 2010; Little, 1993; Riveros, Newton

& Burgess, 2012; Servage, 2008; Wood, 2007). Perhaps the prevalence of disconnect between theory and what occurs in the classroom is notably increasing is because there is a lack of focus on critical reflection for teachers. Perhaps critical reflection allows for the merging of theory and practice. Perhaps constant movement is needed between learning collectively and reflecting individually – placing equal importance on each act—in order to truly merge frames of references and experience transformational learning.

Conclusion

My focus in this study was to look at a group of teachers' experiences of participating in a PLC and seek understanding of ways the participants have experienced transformative kind of learning. The commonalities within the participants' experiences lead to the conditions within the PLC that may improve the possibility for transformative learning to be a realistic outcome. By focusing on adult learning theory, more specifically transformation learning theory, I was able to examine instances of learning and describe how participants were experiencing a transformation of a frame of reference. My suggestions for the future of implementing PLCs document the necessity to honour diverse perspectives within the community and ensure there is adequate time and emphasis placed upon critical reflection. There is great importance in creating the conditions and supports to respect diverse perspectives, with ample time for critical reflection, within each different PLC context. The research on PLCs documents the significance of collaborative time to learn collectively and encourage teachers to reflect; however, there is a theory-practice divide in reality. This divide will persist unless implementation is understood and embraced through the lived consequences, such as conflict and tensions, alongside invigorated agency. This study ignites a sense of hope towards the continued development of PLCs at the school level, with an increased understanding that PLCs need to be developed through an organic, adaptable framework in order to be context-specific through the implementation. This research is significant because the academic world tends to look at teacher professional learning connected with student learning, rather than connecting it to adult learning. If teachers' learning environments were more conducive to adult learning, perhaps they would experience transformational learning (Cranton, 2006). The goal of professional learning in the teaching profession is to examine one's practice critically and acquire new ways of understanding what they do and why they do it (Cranton & King, 2003). If teachers do not consciously consider and reflect on their practice, there is the danger that their practice may continue without teachers considering new questions, insight and innovation.

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