

4-2020

Avoiding Cultural Calamities: Exploring The Influence Of Culture In Intercultural PLCs At An International School

Eric K. Johnson
University of New England

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dune.une.edu/theses>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#), and the [International and Comparative Education Commons](#)

© 2020 Eric K. Johnson

Preferred Citation

Johnson, Eric K., "Avoiding Cultural Calamities: Exploring The Influence Of Culture In Intercultural PLCs At An International School" (2020). *All Theses And Dissertations*. 291.
<https://dune.une.edu/theses/291>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at DUNE: DigitalUNE. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses And Dissertations by an authorized administrator of DUNE: DigitalUNE. For more information, please contact bkenyon@une.edu.

AVOIDING CULTURAL CALAMITIES:
EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE IN INTERCULTURAL PLCs AT AN
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

By

Eric K. Johnson

B.A. (The University of North Carolina at Wilmington) 2000

M.A. (The University of North Carolina at Wilmington) 2012

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Education

Portland & Biddeford, Maine

April, 2020

Copyright Page

Eric Kane Johnson
April 6, 2020
Educational Leadership

AVOIDING CULTURAL CALAMITIES:
EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE IN INTERCULTURAL PLCs
AT AN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

ABSTRACT

This qualitative instrumental case study explored the influence of national culture within the context of professional learning communities (PLCs) at an international school. This study utilized Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory as the theoretical framework and drew from DuFour and Eaker's characteristics of effective PLCs. This instrumental case study focused on one international school located in the European Union. The purpose was to engage international teachers who take part in weekly PLC meetings through a demographic questionnaire, one-on-one interviews and direct observation, in order to develop a better understanding of the influence of culture within those meetings. The study addressed two research questions: (1) what characteristics of professional learning communities, as defined by DuFour and Eaker (1998), are influenced by international teachers' cultural values identified in Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory? And (2) what strategies can K-12 teachers employ to better facilitate the functionality and effectiveness of an intercultural PLC at an international school? Participants of this study included ten teachers who represented four different cultures: (1) American (2) Canadian (3) French (4) Polish. Data was collected using a demographic questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and direct observations. Holistic coding and values coding adapted a thematic analysis method and produced four themes and four subthemes, which were merged to present the findings. The themes presented in the findings were: an unclear mission, no direction, and a lack of buy-in, the change process and elicited emotions, leadership structure, and collaboration,

communication, and trust. Recommendations from the findings and conclusions of this study include building on existing knowledge and structures, developing long- and short-term goals, clarifying leadership structure, and creating processes for monitoring.

Keywords: professional learning community, national culture, international school

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

This dissertation was presented
by

Eric Kane Johnson

It was presented on
April 6, 2020
and approved by:

Dr. Brianna Parsons, Lead Advisor
University of New England

Dr. Cynthia Kennedy, Secondary Advisor
University of New England

Dr. Robert Sims, Affiliated Committee Member
Touro University International

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my parents, Jesse and Kathy, for their unwavering support and belief that I could do anything. There is no collection of words to describe how thankful and proud I am to call you my dad and mom.

I would also like to thank my research committee for their direction and hours of support to ensure my success. A special thank you to my advisor, Dr. Parsons. Your expertise and guidance throughout this process is truly appreciated. Thank you Dr. Kennedy for your clear and timely feedback. Thank you, Dr. Sims, for always making yourself available and offering a different perspective throughout this process.

I would also like to thank Karolina for standing beside me on this journey. We can now focus on planning the rest of our days together.

Dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Katherine. I miss you every day.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose Statement.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Conceptual Framework.....	8
Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope.....	11
Rationale and Significance.....	13
Definition of Terms.....	14
Conclusion.....	15
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	18
Context of the Study.....	19
Significance of the Study.....	20
Problem Statement.....	21
Organization of Chapter 2.....	22
Conceptual Framework.....	22
Personal Interest.....	22
Theoretical Framework.....	24
Topical Research.....	33
Defining Culture.....	34
Research on National Culture.....	35
Criticism of Hofstede’s Research.....	36
Professional Learning Communities.....	37
Overview of Professional Learning Communities and Culture.....	38
Cultural Context and Collaboration.....	41
Professional Learning Communities in International Schools.....	43

Implementing Professional Learning Communities in International Schools.....	44
The Need for Cultural Understanding in International Schools.....	46
Conclusion.....	47
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	50
Purpose of the Study.....	51
Research Questions.....	52
Research Design.....	52
Site Information and Population.....	54
Sampling Method.....	56
Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures.....	57
Demographic Questionnaire.....	57
One-on-One Interviews.....	58
Direct Observations.....	59
Pilot Study.....	59
Data Collection and Dimensions of Culture.....	60
Data Analysis.....	62
Limitations and Delimitations.....	65
Ensuring Trustworthiness.....	67
Credibility.....	68
Transferability.....	69
Confirmability.....	69
Dependability.....	70
Ethical Issues.....	70
Conclusion.....	71
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	73
Setting.....	74
Participant Recruitment and Demographics.....	75

Participant Descriptions.....	79
Methodology and Data Analysis.....	81
Researcher’s Cultural Values.....	83
Coding and Data Analysis.....	86
Presentation of Findings and Themes.....	89
Conclusion.....	108
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS.....	110
Key Findings.....	115
Interpretations of Findings.....	116
Implications for CPT Members and School Leaders.....	132
Limitations.....	136
Findings Related to the Literature.....	137
Recommendations for Research Site.....	140
Recommendations for Further Research.....	144
Conclusion.....	146
REFERENCES.....	148
APPENDIX A: Demographic Questionnaire.....	162
APPENDIX B: Interview Protocol.....	163
APPENDIX C: Observation Protocol.....	167
APPENDIX D: Culture Compass© Results: The United States versus Canada.....	168
APPENDIX E: Culture Compass© Results: The United States versus France.....	170
APPENDIX F: Culture Compass© Results: The United States versus Poland.....	172

List of Tables

Table 1: Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions and descriptions.....	9
Table 2: Participant demographics.....	77
Table 3: Participant demographics (continued).....	78
Table 4: Themes and subthemes.....	89
Table 5: Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions and identifiers.....	112
Table 6: Participants’ cultural alignments.....	113

List of Figures

Figure 1: Conceptual model of cultural dimensions and PLC attributes.....	33
Figure 2: DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of PLCs.....	111

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

All people are alike in a way because they are biologically the same species, but people are also unique individuals and each person is unlike anyone else in the world (G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede, & Pedersen, 2012). Culture is a variable that develops an individual and binds a collective. The culture in which people are raised provides the foundation for developing one's way of thinking, value system, beliefs, and psychological orientations (Saint-Jacques, 2012). A person's culture is partly unique and partly shared with others from the same culture through experiences, beliefs, and traditions (Abramson & Moran, 2018; Hofstede, 2001). As a result, members of a culture share elements of early experiences, which can influence how one mentally contends with a given issue, how one perceives events, and how one should behave (Abramson & Moran, 2018; Hall & Hord, 2011). Marion and Gonzales (2014) explained, "These perceptions are, for them, reality itself, which suggests that 'reality' is more perceived than a concrete state" (p. 263). This concept suggests that culture and cultural dispositions pervade cognitive processes and shape perception, which can directly impact one's understanding of experiences and the idea of acceptable behavior.

Hofstede (2001) defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (p. 9). Culture is a collective phenomenon, firmly rooted in each individual and associated with a set of collective values, traditions, and norms, which can differ from place to place (Hofstede, 2011). "Culture indicates something which is communal and locally specific, with a sense of what is normal within a certain group of people" (Pearce, 2014, p. 388). Hayton, George, and Zahra (2002)

suggested these deeply embedded, unconscious, and even irrational shared values shape individuals, as well as the communities and organizations to which they belong.

Though defined in multiple ways, culture is the driving force of human perception, behavior, and understanding (Abramson & Moran, 2018). “Culture is what we use when we respond to the environment, and it is how we distinguish members of one group from another” (Allen, 2011, p. 18). Culture gives people a sense of who they are, where they belong, and how to behave, which in turn, influences morale, productivity, and openness at work (Abramson & Moran, 2018). In an international school, the effect of culture on perception, beliefs, and values is magnified, as are the cultural differences produced by the multicultural nature of the institution.

International Schools and Culture

There is no formal definition of what an international school actually is, though to be considered international, it is widely agreed that the school delivers a curriculum wholly or partly in English and one different from that of the host country (International School Consultancy, n.d.; Nagrath, 2011). Many schools identified as international subscribe to a philosophical alignment with international curricula such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE), which focus heavily on global citizenship, cultural understanding, and reflective practice (Lijadi & Schalkwyk, 2016; Nagrath, 2011). Additionally, international schools embrace the globalization of education, cater to expatriate and local affluent students, and often boast a culturally diverse teaching staff (Hayden, 2006; Gray & Summers, 2015; Machin, 2017). Though some teachers are hired locally, Anderson (2010) suggested that high tuition costs, the affluent student population, and parent expectations pressure international schools to recruit teachers from

abroad. For international school teachers, the diversity found among the faculty is unique in that it provides a venue for differing educational ideologies and teaching practices to be shared across cultures.

According to Hofstede, Hofstede, and Pedersen (2012), cross-cultural misunderstandings are an underestimated cause of trouble. Schussler, Bercaw, and Stooksberry (2008) asserted that all teachers possess a cultural identity, which shapes how teachers perceive information and experiences, and in turn, cultural dispositions act as a foundation by guiding teachers' decisions related to their own beliefs, values, and cultural norms, which are often bound to their educational practices. Divisions can appear between international teaching staff who are loyal and committed to their native cultural teaching practices and educational ideologies (Schipper, 2014). In many international schools, teachers represent a variety of nationalities, each of whom bring culturally-specific tendencies, dispositions, norms, and perceptions, all of which can disrupt the collaborative culture that successful schools strive to achieve.

Collaboration is widely regarded as a vital component for any successful school (Maloney & Konza, 2011). When schools are organized to support collaboration, teachers are provided an avenue to share best practices, pursue common purposes and goals, establish benchmarks to monitor student success, and jointly examine information regarding student learning to make more informed decisions (DuFour, 2011). In an international school, building a collaborative culture can be difficult due to competitiveness, lack of administrative support, differing ideologies, or conflicting educational philosophies and practices (L. Leonard & P. Leonard, 2003). Schipper (2014) added, "International schools frequently experience challenges in establishing collaboration among their faculty for a number of reasons, including diverse teacher backgrounds and differing native teaching philosophies" (p. 14). One specific way

successful schools can bring teachers together is through professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs, in some form or another, have become a staple in many public and private schools in the United States (Schipper, 2014). International schools are no different in this regard, as PLCs can serve multiple functions including school improvement, curriculum alignment, and professional development.

Professional Learning Communities and Culture

PLCs function in various ways and each is typically dependent on organizational needs and the teachers who take part in the process. DuFour and Eaker (1998) noted that, “What separates a learning community from an ordinary school is its collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what the people in the school believe and what they seek to create” (p. 25). This collective commitment places collaboration at the heart of successful PLC functionality (Brunton, 2016). “In a PLC, collaboration represents a systematic process in which teachers work together interdependently in order to impact their classroom practice in ways that will lead to better results for their students, for their teams, and for their schools” (Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016, p. 12). There is no universal definition for a PLC, though most share common characteristics that contribute to their functionality and effectiveness. DuFour and Eaker (1998) proposed six attributes of successful PLCs: (1) shared mission, vision, and values (2) collective inquiry (3) collaborative teams (4) action orientation and experimentation (5) continuous improvement and (6) results orientation. Though Dufour and Eaker’s (1998) characteristics can provide a solid foundation for effective PLCs, there are certainly obstacles that can surface.

Toole and Louis (2002) identified three rationales for implementing PLCs: (1) PLCs create supportive working conditions and career paths to increase recruitment and retention,

(2) PLCs foster deep and ongoing professional development for teachers, and (3) PLCs make significant and lasting organizational improvement. Though PLCs are venues for supportive working conditions, professional development, and organizational improvement, there are inherent tensions that can emerge, such as teacher autonomy, educational priority, and differences in defining the forms, functions, and outcomes (D. Lee & W. Lee, 2018; Toole & Louis, 2002). In the context of an international school, these tensions can be exacerbated due to the cultural heritage of each faculty member (Toole & Louis, 2002). Different national cultures have preferred ways of motivating employees, structuring groups, and solving problems, which can create obstacles as collaborative concepts are culturally-bound and can be dependent on cultural differences, language difficulties, different logic of thinking, or contrasting perceptions of shared knowledge (Siakas, Georgiadou & Balstrup, 2010; Wei, 2010). The contrasts inherent to cultural differences can create an atmosphere where cultural misunderstandings are prevalent and collaborative efforts are stifled.

In an intercultural PLC, tensions from cultural differences can be an obstacle and make implementation and functionality difficult, as educational practices and ideologies are often sustained by deeply embedded cultural boundaries (Toole & Louis, 2002). These tensions created by differences in cultural values and tendencies can suppress PLC collaboration, functionality, progression, and possibly lead to PLC failure. Developing a foundation for cultural understanding can help alleviate tensions and direct intercultural PLCs toward success.

Statement of the Problem

People from different cultures share basic concepts, but view them from different angles and perspectives, which can influence their behavior in a manner that others consider irrational or are in contradiction to others' beliefs (Lewis, 2005). In the context of international schools,

teachers work in a setting where they are “inescapably connected to each other; yet separated by divergent points of view that make it increasingly difficult to reach each other” (Ishii, Klopff, & Cooke, 2012, p. 57). Toole and Louis (2001) suggested cultural misunderstandings, incorrect assumptions, and misinterpretations regarding pedagogy can create significant barriers for faculty members to collaborate effectively, communicate openly, and work towards a common goal, each of which is a cornerstone of successful PLCs.

Hofstede (2001) argued that each person is mentally programmed by his or her national culture. Samover, Porter, and McDaniel (2012) suggested that culture instills social behaviors and values that have been passed from generation to generation, which influence each person’s way of thinking, perceiving, and behaving. In the context of international education, teachers are a part of a network where success requires navigating through wildly different cultural realities (Meyer, 2015). Unless international teachers understand how to decode other cultures, they are easy victims for cultural misunderstandings, misinterpretations, senseless conflict, and failure (Meyer, 2015). In order for teachers to collaborate effectively, share best practices, and work towards a common goal, a foundation of cultural understanding must be built.

Though research focused on Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions theory, cross-cultural collaboration, and PLCs exists, there are limited data about the role of teachers in cross-cultural collaborative activities in international schools (Brunton, 2016; Klein, 2016). Moreover, the review of the literature indicated that there is a lack of research directed at intercultural PLCs or about the strategies used to work across cultural divisions in the context of an intercultural PLC (Brunton, 2016; Klein, 2016). In addition, the literature reviewed showed that international schools are largely neglected in cross-cultural studies of multicultural organizations.

This qualitative study aimed to fill that gap in knowledge and contribute to the existing research on national culture and PLCs by combining these concepts and focusing on the influence of culture in intercultural PLCs within the context of an international school. The concept of PLCs in international schools, combined with the multicultural staff, offer a unique opportunity to explore the cultural influences and tendencies that can affect collaboration, organizational culture, and the school as a whole.

Purpose Statement

Samovar et al. (2012) posited, “Two things are crucial if you are to relate effectively to people from diverse international cultures: (1) you must be knowledgeable about the diversity of people from other cultures; and (2) you must respect their diversity” (p. 145). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the influence of international K-12 teachers’ culture on intercultural PLCs in an international school context. Using Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions theory as a lens and utilizing an instrumental case study approach, this study highlights how cultural tendencies influence PLC functionality and PLC members’ perception of DuFour and Eaker’s (1998) six attributes of successful PLCs: (1) shared mission, vision, and values (2) collective inquiry (3) collaborative teams (4) action orientation and experimentation (5) continuous improvement and (6) results orientation. An instrumental case study concentrates on a specific issue and serves the purpose of illuminating that issue within the case (Creswell, 2015). This study sought to illuminate the influence of international K-12 teachers’ culture within the context of an intercultural PLC at an international school.

This instrumental case study focused on one international school located in the European Union. The intent was to engage international teachers who take part in weekly PLC meetings, through one-on-one interviews and direct observation, in order to gain a better understanding of

the influence of culture within those meetings. Given the boundedness of a case study approach, this study provided insight for the research site regarding better PLC functionality and improved collaborative efforts. With a focus on international teachers, the findings of this study can help PLC facilitators and members better understand the cultural tendencies of colleagues within an intercultural PLC. A better understanding of the cultural factors that contribute to and predict effective PLCs can be instrumental in the success of PLC functionality and facilitation.

Research Questions

In response to the insufficient research focused on national culture and professional learning communities within international schools, this qualitative instrumental case study aimed to bring these concepts together and explore the influence that culture might have within an intercultural PLC. This researcher addressed the following research questions:

1. What characteristics of professional learning communities, as defined by DuFour and Eaker (1998), are influenced by international teachers' cultural values identified in Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory?
2. What strategies can K-12 teachers employ to better facilitate the functionality and effectiveness of an intercultural PLC at an international school?

Conceptual Framework

This case study explored the influence of national culture on intercultural PLCs in an international school. In an international school, teachers' educational beliefs, pedagogical practices, collaborative actions, and perceptions can be challenged due to the differences in cultural understanding and predispositions. Yoo (2014) argued these cultural differences could lead to clashes within the organization when perceptions differ among colleagues. These misunderstandings can be the result of cultural differences, tendencies, values, or cultural

dispositions related to working in teams, each of which could limit or stifle the collaborative nature of PLCs (Hofstede, 2011; Siakas, Georgiadou & Balstrup, 2010). Klein (2016) suggested collaboration is essentially about the work of a group, and it is imperative to understand who the individual collaborators are, how they are motivated, how they interact with others, and the cultural context from which they originate. With a focus on the influence of culture, this instrumental case study used Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory as the theoretical framework for the research. The six dimensions of culture (Table 1) determined the structure and focus of each research question, and how the data was collected, analyzed, synthesized and reported (Creswell, 2015).

Table 1

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Descriptions

Cultural Dimension	Description of Cultural Dimension
The Power Distance Index (PDI)	Related to the different solutions to the basic problem of human inequity
Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI)	Related to the level of stress in a society in the face of an unknown future
Individualism and Collectivism (IDV)	Related to the integration of individuals into primary groups
Masculinity and Femininity (MAS)	Related to the division of emotional roles between men and women
Long- versus Short-Term Orientation (LTO)	Related to the value placed on traditions within a society
Indulgence versus restraint (IND)	Related to the extent by which people try to control their desires

From: Hofstede's Six Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 2001, p. 29; Sanderson, 2007, p. 2)

In order to explore the influence of national culture within a PLC, an effective and reliable model was necessary. The DuFour and Eaker PLC model (1998) identified six key characteristics of effective PLCs: (1) shared mission, vision, and values, (2) collective inquiry, (3) collaborative teams, (4) action orientation and experimentation, (5) continuous improvement, and (6) results orientation. Though not all encompassing, these characteristics illustrate common attributes that successful PLCs share.

The study site, The International School of Europe (ISE) (pseudonym), is a private international school located in Europe. Currently, ISE has implemented a version of PLCs in an effort to align curriculum and create more opportunities for collaboration among teachers. ISE's model of PLC, known by teachers as Collaborative Planning Teams (CPTs), meet once a week and are separated into departments. For all intents and purposes, the CPTs reflect DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of an effective PLC. In spite of encompassing key attributes for success, the learning communities at ISE have yet to evolve into fully functioning or effective PLCs.

This instrumental case study draws from three data points in an effort to illuminate the influence of culture within ISE's model of PLCs. Data was collected by a demographic questionnaire, intending to link teachers with the appropriate cultural dimension, as defined by Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory. Individual interviews were also conducted in an effort to identify the cultural values of participating teachers. Observation notes were collected in order to align perceived cultural tendencies of participants with their interview responses and Hofstede's (2001) cultural values. Data was analyzed using Braun and Clark's (2012) six steps of thematic analysis: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and

(6) producing the report. Data underwent two phases of coding. Holistic coding was utilized for initial data analysis and the second phase included value coding. The data collected and analyzed offer insights into the influence that national culture has within an intercultural PLC.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Assumptions are a necessary element in case study research as they address beliefs that cannot be proven (Simon & Goes, 2013). Also, given the bounded system of this case study, it was essential to identify inherent limitations beyond the researcher's control. The scope of this case study referred to the parameters in which the research took place and contextualized the issue (Simon & Goes, 2013) of national culture in PLCs.

A basic assumption that may have affected this study was the idea that international teachers, and specifically CPT facilitators, identified cultural differences or tendencies as an obstacle for effective CPTs. It was also assumed that all CPTs function in a similar manner. Considering PLCs come in many forms, distinguishing between effective and ineffective could have been difficult for some participants. A second assumption that could have affected this study is found in the data collection methods. It was assumed that CPT members (teachers) responded to interview questions thoughtfully, openly, and honestly, especially since confidentiality is an assured priority. It was assumed that CPT participants acted and behaved professionally during PLC observations.

Limitations

Like all qualitative case studies, there are inherent limitations to acknowledge. Given the instrumental case study design, limitations of this research included generalizability, sample size, and time. In addition, preexisting relationships between the researcher and participants could be considered a limitation, as could participant and researcher bias. The researcher's cultural

dispositions should also be acknowledged as a limitation, particularly in regard to data analysis. Language could also be viewed as a limitation, as a percentage of participants, while proficient in English, were not native English speakers.

Yin (2018) proposed that case studies are generalizable in theoretical propositions, but not necessarily outside of those propositions. This case study aimed to highlight the influence of national culture in PLCs in the context of one international school in Europe. Given the parameters of this bounded case study, specific findings might not be applicable to other international schools. However, findings could be applicable in a broad sense, as many international schools are comprised of multiple nationalities. Moreover, the small sample size might not accurately reflect the extent of influence that culture has in intercultural PLCs. Additionally, this case study is bound to one international school with a multicultural demographic. Therefore, findings might not be applicable to PLCs in other international school or PLCs comprised of other nationalities or a single nationality.

A common limitation in qualitative case studies is researcher bias. Therefore, preexisting relationships between the researcher and participants could increase this bias, as could the researcher's own national culture. Hofstede (2001) argued the values of the researcher play a role in how the researcher observes, describes, analyzes, and understands reality, and then suggested researchers should be as clear as possible about his or her own value system. In order to address these limitations, the researcher completed an external cultural analysis questionnaire that identified personal preferences and cultural values based on Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory. In addition, member-checking procedures were used to confirm interview data and an audit trail was kept throughout the research process.

Scope

The scope of this instrumental case study did exclude a small number of teachers at ISE. In order to engage in an in-depth exploration, research participants must take part in weekly CPT meetings. Participants had to also be full-time teachers at the elementary, middle, or secondary school level. Given the participant parameters for this research, teachers who worked on a part-time basis or served as a teaching assistant fell outside the scope of this study. Similarly, the school librarian and student support specialists were excluded, as they did not regularly meet in CPTs. In addition, teachers who fell under the researcher's authority or responsibility were excluded but took part in a pilot study. Due to the leadership structure of CPTs and research focus, the scope of this study also excluded school administrators, as CPT leadership is typically shared among members, though heads of department often facilitate the meetings. Some CPT facilitators are relatively new to international teaching or have worked in one school during their international career. Though this is not necessarily a negative aspect, it does limit their exposure to different cultures and effective strategies for cross-cultural collaboration.

Rationale and Significance

In an international school, cultural differences and diversity are phenomena with their own riches and, by exploring the concept, can offer invaluable benefits for a multicultural teaching faculty, provoking the need to develop strategies that cater to mutual understanding (Lewis, 2005). Samover et al. (2012) suggested that culture has instilled in each person behaviors and values passed down from generation to generation which affect ways of perceiving and acting. These "behaviors and values are so much a part of one's persona, it is easy to forget that they are culturally ingrained and vary across cultures" (p. 145). Due to their multicultural

demographics, international schools are unique educational institutions that offer an excellent perspective on culture and the tendencies that shape behavior.

The significance of this study is found, not only in the exploration of culture, but also in the context of intercultural PLCs. As international schools provide systems of collaboration, school improvement, and curriculum development through PLCs, how culture manifests itself is worthy of consideration. As more international schools recognize that establishing a collaborative culture “cannot be the domain of one individual or a senior group due to its complex nature” and that workplace responsibility is dependent on “reciprocal actions of a number of people” (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006, p. 237), PLCs, in one form or another, could become a priority.

Taking this into consideration, this research was significant, timely, and relevant to the study site and the PLC model to which ISE subscribes. As ISE continues to grow as an organization, collaboration and cultural understanding are vital to the organization. As ISE teachers better understand the relevance of culture, they will be better equipped to assess situations and make decisions that are appropriate for their PLCs, the school as a whole, and the students who are served (Livermore, 2015). Simply, a better understanding of the cultural factors found within ISE would be beneficial for the success of PLC functionality and facilitation.

Definition of Terms

Collaboration: “to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor” (Collaboration, *Merriam-Webster*, 2019).

Culture: “Culture is the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from those of another” (Hofstede, 2001, p. 9).

Cultural Awareness: “the ability and willingness to objectively examine the values, beliefs, traditions and perceptions within our own and other cultures” (O’Brian, 2017).

Expatriate: “A person who lives in a foreign country” (Expatriate, *Merriam-Webster*, 2019).

IBL: An acronym used by research participants for the learning theory Inquiry Based Learning.

Intercultural PLC: A Professional Learning Community “comprised of teachers of different nationalities and having different cultural backgrounds, educational and teaching experiences, and English proficiency” (Brunton, 2016, p. 3).

International School: “schools where staff of different nationalities teach an international curriculum to students of different nationalities” (Brunton, 2016, p. 3).

Professional Learning Community: An ongoing process of collaboration where educators utilize collective inquiry and action research in order to promote student learning and achievement (DuFour & DuFour, 2012; Huffman & Hipp, 2003).

Tendency: “a proneness to a particular kind of thought or action” (Tendency, *Merriam-Webster*, 2019).

UbD: An acronym used by research participants to denote the backward design of curriculum process Understanding by Design.

Conclusion

Livermore (2015) argued there are few universals that are true for most everyone and the most important points of understanding are the beliefs, values, and assumptions that lie beneath the surface and shape behavior and perception. Cultural differences in international schools can create tensions that undermine cross-cultural interaction and new ways of understanding (Toole

& Louis, 2002). The ability to manage cultural differences is needed in order to establish effective communication among a culturally diverse staff (Gibbs, 2009; Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013). Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory provides a foundation to understand cultural tendencies and values and the influence they might have. International schools embody the idea of multiculturalism, as educators from different countries come together to collaborate, share best practices, and support student achievement. One approach that can foster collaboration is implementing PLCs. Within this context, the issue of cultural differences arises, as teachers bring with them their own embedded values, understanding, perception, and educational ideologies. These differences can work as an obstacle and stifle the collaborative processes in which successful PLCs are founded. Understanding these cultural differences becomes critical in an international school in order for PLCs to function successfully.

Chapter 1 introduced several issues in regard to cultural differences and values of a multicultural organization. Chapter 1 explained the need for, the purpose, and the significance of this study within the context of international schools. Chapter 1 also described the research questions this study aims to answer and included definitions for key terminology specific to the study.

Chapter 2 further addresses the topic of study, provides details regarding international schools, and articulates the statement of the problem. The conceptual framework offers insight into the personal interest of the topic, related topical research on DuFour and Eaker's (1998) PLC model characteristics, and describes the theoretical framework based on Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory. Chapter 2 also includes reviewed literature, which explains Hofstede's (2001) influential research and a detailed overview of each cultural dimension, as well as criticism of Hofstede's work. The reviewed literature then delves into professional

learning communities and their implementation in the context of international schools. The literature also discusses concerns and obstacles during the implementation process, focusing on the role of national culture and the need for cultural intelligence.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design and outlines the methods of data collection and analysis. Chapter 3 also addresses identified limitations, ethical issues, and trustworthiness of the research. Chapter 4 of the study provides the results of the data analysis and identified themes within the data. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of the study and includes a discussion about the identified themes in relation to data interpretation. Chapter 5 also offers connections to the reviewed literature, implications to consider, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks. The works cited and appendices follow chapter five.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stuart (2016) argued, “For teachers in international schools, the single biggest benefit of PLCs is the unmatched professional growth that comes with becoming vulnerable enough with colleagues and being willing to challenge every teaching, assessment, and intervention method to better serve students” (p. 2). With different cultures come many cultural differences, which can impact necessary organizational processes and collaboration among colleagues. Understanding how cultural differences and cultural context affect cross-cultural communication can produce new approaches to collaboration (Meyer, 2015). Within a PLC, communication and collaboration are critical, and in an international context are reliant on cultural dispositions.

This study explored the influence of national culture on intercultural PLCs in an international school. This study used Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions theory as a theoretical framework and related collected data to each dimension, identified cultural norms on PLCs, applied collected data to DuFour and Eaker’s (1998) six characteristics of effective PLCs, and sought to propose strategies to promote collaboration among a multicultural staff. The literature reviewed established an essential foundation for the study and identified a gap in research that can help school leaders and teachers overcome cultural differences and utilize PLCs for effective collaborative processes.

Parameters of the Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review was to provide a foundational understanding of culture, PLCs, and international schools. Search parameters for literature related to culture included Hofstede’s (2001) dimensions of culture, how culture is defined, cross-cultural communication, and multicultural organizations. Literature focusing on international schools was

also identified in order to provide a description and explanation of the context for the study. Given the immense amount of literature pertaining to PLCs, search fields were narrowed to focus on successful PLC characteristics, DuFour and Eaker's (1998) PLC model, implementation in an international context, and obstacles to overcome for success. The sources of data included literature from the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, the University of New England library, and printed academic works.

The literature reviewed focused on the influence of culture in PLCs within an international school and the need for cultural understanding. In reviewing the literature, five major themes emerged: (1) national culture, (2) multicultural organizations, (3) cross-cultural collaboration, (4) cultural understanding, and (5) successful PLCs. The reviewed literature addressed Hofstede's (2001) six dimensions of culture theory, DuFour and Eaker's (1998) six characteristics of effective PLCs, the concept of effective PLCs within an international school environment, and the need for cultural understanding.

Context of the Research

International schools are often perceived as outliers when discussing educational institutions. There is not a specific criteria that defines international schools, though schools tend to describe themselves as international based on certain characteristics, such as the multicultural teacher demographics, their use of an international curriculum, marketing and competition with other schools, or their educational philosophy and mission (Gray & Summers, 2015; Hayden, 2006; Stuart, 2016). Though schools vary in their description, "international schools typically reflect a very diverse staff" (Williams, 2019, p. 6). The diversity found among international school staff is unique, as many schools have teachers and administrators who represent different countries. Given this, each person brings with them their own cultural identity and perspectives

that reflect their cultural heritage (Williams, 2019). These cultural norms brought by international teachers can conflict with their colleagues' beliefs.

Many international teachers work abroad for years and can make the mistake of viewing everything from their own cultural perspective, assuming that any differences, controversy, or misunderstanding are rooted in personality (Meyer, 2015). Members of any culture have many elements of early experiences in common, which produce similar personality traits (Abramson & Moran, 2018). However, "if you go into every interaction assuming that culture doesn't matter, your default mechanism will be to view others through your own cultural lens and to judge or misjudge them accordingly" (Meyer, 2015, p. 13). In an international school, this cultural diversity can create difficult scenarios and challenges for individuals and the organization (Ang et al., 2007). Cultural misunderstandings, incorrect assumptions, and uncertainty regarding pedagogy (Toole & Louis, 2001) can create significant barriers for faculty members. In spite of this, members of different cultural groups are expected to develop the capacity to build relationships, collaborate, and "develop a shared understanding regardless of their cultural differences in situations where intercultural relationships are in effect" such as PLCs (Sims, 2011, p. 27). This concept is not always easy, as the cultural norms of teachers can be contradictory in nature.

Significance of the Study

Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory has been applied to a wide variety of organizational studies, but there is very little empirical evidence regarding its application in an international school. Though research demonstrates that employees draw their identities and, consequently, their work styles from the culture in which they claim membership, there is a lack of attention to intercultural or cross-cultural collaboration in real world settings, suggesting the

need for a comprehensive theoretical approach to better understand the collaborative processes in the context of intercultural teams (Gibbs, 2009; Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013).

Additionally, there are limited data regarding individuals involved in cross-cultural collaborative efforts or about strategies to work through the cultural divide (Klein, 2016). The literature reviewed and this study addresses that knowledge gap and provide insight for international schools to establish effective PLCs.

Problem Statement

According to Brunton (2016), “The effectiveness of PLCs depends on the ability of educators to collaborate” (p. 4). International schools that subscribe to a PLC model can face common obstacles of effective PLC implementation, such as lack of time or buy-in, a competitive organizational culture, and lack of ownership (Provini, 2013). The added multicultural component of an international school compounds this difficulty, as teachers and leaders often overlook culture as a variable which influences perception, behavior, and personality (Hofstede et al., 2012). Unfortunately, this oversight could stifle the goals and vision of PLCs and create cultural misunderstandings or assumptions.

In the context of an international school, teachers typically represent different cultures and nationalities, each with their own norms, producing a vital need for mastering the ability to interact with different cultures (Allen, 2011). “This means developing an unconscious competence in dealing with cross-cultural issues and having an internalized map that allows one to deal naturally with differing cultural terrains” (Hodge, 2000, p. 25). Fullan, (2016) suggested these assumptions are influential and frequently subconscious actions, which are often founded in prior experiences and cultural beliefs, creating a need for cultural awareness and understanding within an international school.

Organization of Chapter Two

The conceptual framework set the stage for this research, bringing in personal interest, topical research related to DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of PLCs, and the theoretical framework rooted in Hofstede's (2001) six dimensions of culture theory. The literature reviewed explored the term "culture" and its variety of definitions. The reviewed literature then explained Hofstede's (2001) seminal research and provides an overview and explanation of Hofstede's (2001) six dimensions of national culture, which established the foundation for this study. The literature then addresses criticism of Hofstede's (2001) research. The reviewed literature also offers an overview of PLCs and their implementation in an international school context. The literature also delves into concerns and obstacles with implementing PLCs in an international context, focusing on the role of national culture and the importance of cultural intelligence.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework intends to provide a clear explanation of the study's conception and offer direction for the research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017). The conceptual framework gives insight into personal interest of the research topic and explains the theoretical lens by which the research is viewed. Supportive literature is included as topical research, which further advocates for the need of the study.

Personal Interest

This study explored the influence of culture in the context of an intercultural PLC at an international school. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) note that personal interests come from one's curiosity, passions, beliefs, and values, and are the motivation for asking questions and seeking knowledge. The researcher's interest in national culture, in the context of international schools and specifically PLCs, stems from experiences as an international educator.

A typical characteristic of international schools is the diverse, multicultural staff (Williams, 2019). Teachers and administrators representing different countries come together to educate international and local students, bringing with them different educational ideologies, teaching practices, and cultural beliefs (Schipper, 2014; Williams, 2019). Siakas, Georgiadou and Balstrup (2010) found that misunderstandings between employees in a multicultural grouping were most often the result of cultural differences, language barriers, perception of tasks, or cultural dispositions related to working in teams. In the three international schools where the researcher has worked, and the countless conversations with other international educators, the most common answer to school issues, such as lack of consistency, educational understanding, curriculum alignment, communication, organizational change, or collaboration, was the cultural differences found among the school's faculty.

Kastan and Bozan suggested, "One of the main problems in a multicultural education environment is seen as the cultural diversity by educators and administrators" (as cited in Karadeniz & İncirci, 2016, p. 88). Culture plays a significant role in how one perceives experiences and situations. One's culture, including beliefs, processes, and norms are ingrained since early infancy and provide a fundamental understanding of the world (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Pedersen, 2012). Meyer (2015) posited, "Cultural patterns of behavior and belief frequently impact our perceptions (what we see), cognitions (what we think), and actions (what we do)" (p. 14). Considering this, cultural differences can be a challenge to overcome in an international school, as teachers typically represent different countries and bring with them culturally shaped perceptions, understandings, and behaviors.

In an international school, learning to manage cultural differences is necessary for international school leaders and teachers to establish effective collaboration (Abramson &

Moran, 2018). Successful collaborators possess an awareness of the differences, decision-making issues, and power dynamics that are inherent in collaborative work (Klein, 2016). PLCs can provide an avenue for schools to promote a collaborative culture and share best practices (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Provini, 2013). However, effective PLCs can be difficult to implement and maintain due to time constraints, fragmented visions, lack of support, or deficient teacher buy-in (Leonard & Leonard, 2003; Provini, 2013). International schools have an added variable as “The overall characteristics of the teaching staff at international schools pose major issues in establishing effective and sustainable teacher collaborative learning structures” (Schipper, 2014, p. 21). The cultural differences found among the international school staff often includes deeply embedded educational beliefs and pedagogical practices. To overcome this added variable for effective PLC implementation, international teachers and administrators must develop some level of cultural understanding.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework determines the research questions, observations, methodology, and data analysis of a research study (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). With a focus on the influence of culture, this study utilized Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions theory as the theoretical framework for the research. Hofstede (2001) breaks down the social interactions that people in almost every society are involved in and categorizes them (Yoo, 2014). Though such interactions are not necessarily found in all societies or hold equal value, by creating categories, Hofstede (2001) helps make the comparison of various cultural interactions easier (Yoo, 2014). Gibbs (2009) suggested cross-cultural research makes an important contribution by focusing attention on cultural differences and challenging the prevalent

misperception that organizational theories and practices are universally applicable, which often presents a stumbling block for multinational institutions.

Hofstede's dimensions of culture. Though originally intended to identify cultural differences and their impact on employees' work values, Hofstede's (2001) research became the foundation for cross-cultural business and management, yielding greater cultural understanding and allowing for cross-cultural comparisons (Bird, 2005). Hofstede's (2001) research focuses on culture as a shared phenomenon, rather than personalities, which are unique to individuals (Hofstede, 2001). The culmination of Hofstede's (2001) research resulted in the development of six dimensions of culture theory.

Hofstede et al. (2012) suggested that each culture shares five basic problems of social life: (1) identity (2) hierarchy (3) gender (4) truth and (5) virtue. Identity addresses the relationship between the individual and the group and is found in cultures identified as individualistic or collectivist. Hierarchy focuses on the degree of inequality in a society, defined as the power-distance index (Hofstede, 2001). A high power-distance index is easier to maintain in a situation of poverty and limited resources. The equality, or lack thereof, in gender roles is also identified as a problem of society. How societies understand truth is also identified as a problem. Truth is described as how people cope with the unexpected or ambiguous, which speaks to the fear of the unknown, creating the uncertainty avoidance index (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Pedersen, 2012). Societies also struggle with maintaining traditional values and social norms. Virtue relates to the choices between past and future values, defined by Hofstede (2001) as long-term and short-term orientation.

Power distance index. The first cultural dimension that Hofstede (2001) identified was power distance index (PDI). This dimension addresses hierarchy and measures social inequality,

the prevailing norms within the culture, and “the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9). The PDI measures inequalities within the social constructs of a nation and within an organization. The PDI also measures interpersonal power and influence among colleagues, best illustrated by the hierarchy of leaders and subordinates.

According to Hofstede (2001), nations with low scores on the PDI work toward minimizing inequalities, view colleagues as equals, and acknowledge equal rights (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001; Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010.). Hofstede (2001) found that the United States, United Kingdom, Netherlands, and Germany have the lowest power distance scores. Citizens from these countries typically seek equality within society. This concept is best understood in the United States Pledge of Allegiance, “with liberty and justice for all” (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010.).

Conversely, nations with a high power distance index accept hierarchy and the inequalities that come with it (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). Superiors view subordinates as different, and vice-versa. It is also accepted that those who hold power are entitled to privileges and elders are respected and feared. Societies with a high PDI accept differences between people, do not consider each other equal, expect leaders to lead and make decisions autocratically, and believe that life exists in levels of hierarchy that reinforce inequality (Allen, 2011). Countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia score quite high on PDI, a reflection of their government, national leadership, and respect for elders.

Toole and Louis (2001) recognized countries with a relatively recent shift in political, social, and educational ideologies, such as Poland and Czech Republic. Given the history of countries located in Eastern Europe, there is a perceived shift in cultural and social values.

During Communism, the government did not promote critical and reflective thinking; instead, leaders expected compliance (Toole & Louis, 2001). Those born and raised during Communist times have a distinctly different “mental programming” (Hofstede, 2001) than current and future generations. In this aspect, it is important to consider both the current mentality and one influenced by historical events, in a multicultural setting.

Uncertainty avoidance index. The second dimension of national culture that Hofstede (2001) found addressed truth and is labeled uncertainty avoidance index (UAI). The UAI dimension measures the degree to which members of a society feel comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity, especially regarding change (Hofstede, 2001; Routamaa & Hautala, 2008). The UAI “indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel comfortable or uncomfortable in unstructured situations” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 10). Cultures with a weak UAI “try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and on the philosophical and religious level by a belief in absolute Truth (Hofstede, 2011, p. 10). The fundamental issue in UAI relates to how societies deal with the future and the idea that it can never be known (Hofstede, 2001). Moreover, the social norms related to the acceptance or rejections of change are established culturally, as people tend to adapt to the change or create barriers that prohibit change.

Hofstede’s (2001) research included three central questions to measure uncertainty avoidance:

- (1) Rule orientation: Company rules should not be broken - even when the employee thinks it is in the company’s best interest,”
- (2) Employment stability: employees’ statement regarding time frame and intentions to stay with their organization, and
- (3) Stress: How often do you feel nervous or tense at work? (p. 150)

The collected data measured people's perception of change and their view of the uncertain future, gaining insight into the influence of national culture in change processes.

Hofstede (2001) found that countries with low UAI scores have lower stress and anxiety levels. These countries do not value company loyalty and employees do not necessarily experience hesitation when changing jobs (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001; Hofstede, 2001.). Hofstede's (2001) data show countries such as Jamaica, Denmark, and Sweden score low on the UAI, making them more open to uncertainty and adaptable to change. Countries such as Greece, Portugal, and Japan score in the high UAI matrix. These countries rely on rules and laws to avoid uncertainty and are effective planners to minimize any risk of change. The United States scores below average, suggesting the mix of cultures within the country and the perception of uncertainty is based on context and situation (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). The UAI matrix can be seen within organizations as well, as nationality and cultural components influence workers' perception of change and how they react to uncertainty. How one perceives and reacts to uncertain situations is an essential understanding within a multicultural organization.

Individualism versus collectivism. Hofstede's (2001) third dimension of national culture focused on identity and was identified as individualism versus collectivism (IDV) and describes the relationship between the individual and the collective that prevails in a given society. Smith and Dugan (1996) explained, "Individualism-collectivism refers to the extent to which the identity of members of a given culture is shaped primarily by personal choices and achievements or by the groups to which they belong" (p. 232). Individualist cultures prefer a loosely knit framework where individuals take care of themselves and their immediate family. Conversely, collectivist cultures expect to be taken care of by family and friends and approach decision making as a group (Smith & Dugan, 1996). A society's position on this dimension is

reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we" (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). The linguistic distinction between "I" and "we" is an essential aspect of "mental programming" and is reflected in how people prefer to live and who they feel responsible for.

Hofstede, Hofstede, and Pedersen (2012) suggested the cultures of the poorest countries are typically collectivist, while the wealthiest countries are relatively individualistic. This is likely due to poverty and limited resources in poorer nations, which can produce the need of reliance on others (Hofstede et al., 2012). Wealthy countries typically have ample resources, which make it easier for individuals to take care of themselves. According to Hofstede (2001), countries with a low IDV score are considered collectivist. In these cultures, people often live with or close to family members and often take care of the elderly. In an organization, group determines opinions and workplaces reflect a family relationship (Hofstede, 2001). In a collectivist society, members do not speak up without group sanction, subgroups are formed, nepotism is accepted and tolerated, conflict is avoided, and learning is for the young or inexperienced (Allen, 2011). Gibbs (2009) found that employees from a collectivistic culture perceived their teammates from individualist societies as 'unfriendly' and 'cold' because they did not socialize with them after work or help them acclimatize. A low IDV suggests harmony is essential and confrontations are avoided; the need for individual identity is nonexistent or repressed (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001). Countries that score low in the individualist matrix include India, Guatemala, Colombia, and the majority of Southeast Asia.

Countries that score high in the IDV matrix have weaker family ties, prefer privacy, value independent thinking, and personal opinions are expected (Hofstede, 2001). In an individualist culture, organizations and the relationships between colleagues take on a transactional role,

though close relationships can be formed. In an individualistic society, employees speak out, nepotism is considered immoral, conflicts are constructive, and learning is lifelong (Allen, 2011). Employees from an individualist culture expect colleagues to be self-reliant and take the initiative to figure things out on their own and ask questions if they need help (Gibbs, 2009). The United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand score in the highest bracket of IDV, though there is one country that scores the highest: The United States (Hofstede, 2001). Given the history of the United States and how the country was founded, the high score is not surprising. The idea of the “American Dream” where anyone can succeed and have a better life than their parents is reflective of the individualist culture (Hofstede, 2011). The individualist versus collectivist dimension is an integral component of identifying national culture and one that should be considered in a multicultural organization.

Masculinity versus femininity. The fourth dimension of Hofstede’s (2001) work, masculinity versus femininity (MAS), focused on gender and identifies the expected emotional differences among gender roles. The MAS index refers to the distributed roles between genders. The masculinity side of the dimension reflects a society of assertiveness, achievement, materialism, competitiveness, and success, while the femininity side exhibits cooperation, modesty, and caring for others. (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001; Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010; Smith & Dugan, 1996). It’s important to note that the MAS dimension measures expected emotional gender roles and includes the extent to which the use of force is socially endorsed (Hofstede et al., 2010). Interestingly, Hofstede’s (2001) IBM study showed that women’s values were cross-culturally emotionally similar, while men’s values contained a measure of competition, assertiveness, and power-hunger in each society. This concept can be supported by

the historical descriptions of genders, identifying men as hunters and gatherers and women as caring nurturers.

Countries that fall into the highly masculine index include German-speaking countries, The United Kingdom, The United States, and Mexico. At the top of the MAS index is Japan, a country traditionally known for subservient women and fueled by a competitive spirit. At the opposite end of the spectrum are Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden, countries that align with a femininity culture, illustrating a society that emphasizes care and compassion for others and values toward quality of life. Interestingly, the countries that score low on the MAS scale and tend to value quality of life over competitiveness also consistently score in the top ten happiest countries (Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2018). In an intercultural organization, the MAS index provides some insight into how colleagues might form relationships with others and where they place value within the organization.

Long-term orientation versus short-term orientation. The fifth dimension is independent of the others and measures virtues, or how societies value tradition and is suspicious of social change (Hofstede, 2001). The long-term orientation versus short-term orientation (LTO) dimension includes religious and philosophical themes and the ability to solve well-defined problems (Hofstede, 2001). Countries that score low on this spectrum are identified as long-term oriented, while countries that score high are short-term oriented. Essentially, the LTO dimension distinguishes the difference in thinking between the East and the West.

Long-term oriented countries place value on “perseverance, thrift, ordering relationships by status, and having a sense of shame” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 23). Hofstede (2001) found the majority of Asian countries fall under the umbrella of long-term orientated, as they are heavily influenced by the pragmatic teachings of Confucius. In societies with a pragmatic orientation,

people believe that truth depends very much on situation, context and time (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). Contrarily, countries identified as short-term orientated hold a respect for traditions, adhere to social obligations, and emphasize ‘saving face’ when in the wrong (Hofstede, 2011). In an organization, the LTO dimension can help define who is adaptable and pragmatic relative to change and can allow leaders to adapt accordingly.

Indulgence versus restraint. The sixth and newest dimension added to Hofstede’s work was indulgence and restraint (IND). Hofstede (2011) explained, “Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that controls gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms” (p. 15). In an indulgent culture, it is good to be free and to succumb to what one wants to do, friends are important, and life makes sense (Hofstede et al., 2010). In a restrained culture, there is a feeling that life is difficult and duty, rather than freedom, is the norm (Hofstede et al., 2010). Essentially, the IND dimension measures the extent by which people try to control their desires (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010.). The IND index complements the LTO dimension, though in a negative way, as the idea of tradition in LTO conflicts with the idea of freedom and free will in the IND index.

Hofstede (2011) found that countries in South and North America and Western Europe scored incredibly high on the indulgence spectrum. These societies value freedom of speech, leisure time, and, interestingly, have a disproportionate amount of obese people (Hofstede, 2011). Conversely, countries identified as restrained societies, mostly located in Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East scored significantly lower. These cultures typically restrain their desires, avoiding their wants while succumbing to their needs.

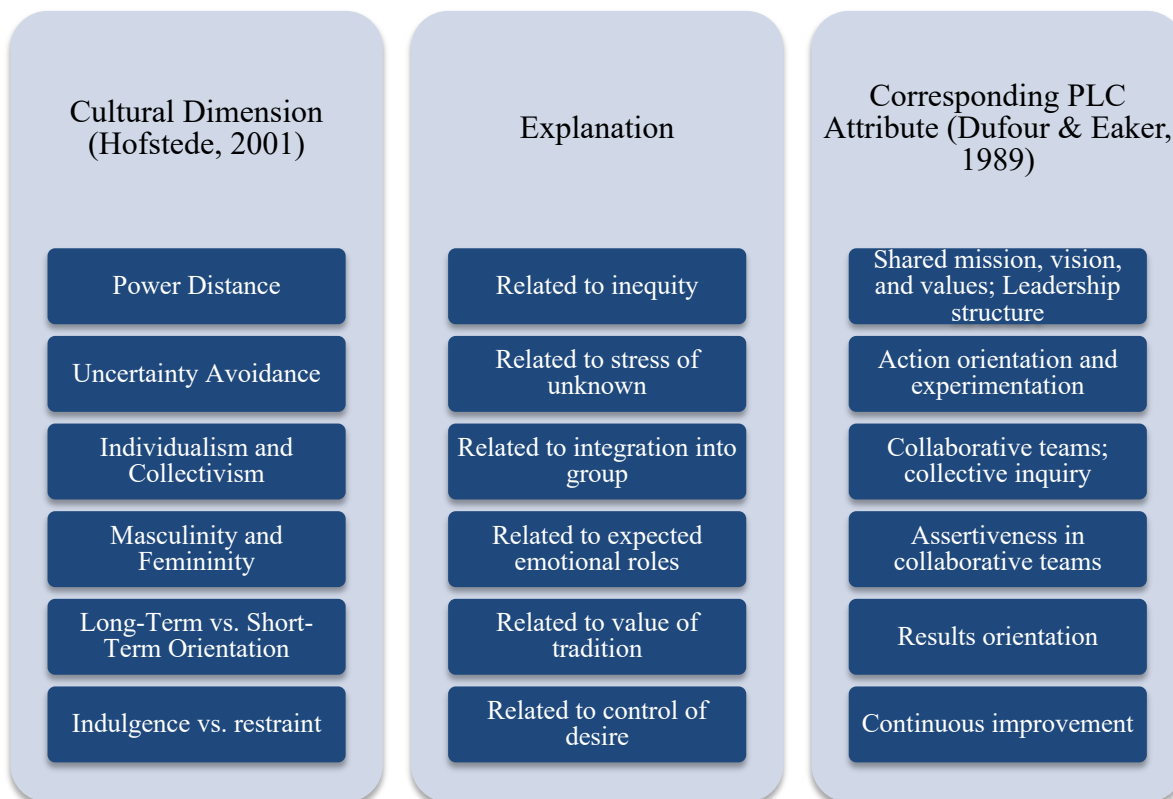


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Cultural Dimensions and PLC Attributes (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hofstede, 2001, p. 29; Sanderson, 2007, p. 2)

Topical Research

Many international schools commonly recruit and hire teachers from different countries, which can mean contrasting philosophical beliefs, pedagogical practices, and educational understanding (Brunton, 2019). Due to the cultural differences typically associated with international schools, opposing cultural viewpoints can challenge these beliefs and understandings. Lee (2015) found that when the norms of school leaders, the adapted curriculum, and established learning theories conflicted with the norms of teachers' home country, the international teacher often experienced "cultural dissonance and confusion" (p. 46). Different national cultures have preferred ways of motivating employees, structuring organizations or groups, and solving problems which can create obstacles as leadership theories and collaboration

concepts are culturally bound and can be dependent on cultural differences, language difficulties, different logic of thinking, or different perceptions of shared knowledge that might not be easily adapted to another culture (Siakas, Georgiadou & Balstrup, 2010, Wei, 2010). Yoo (2014) argued that cultural differences could also lead to clashes within the organization when perceptions differ among colleagues. The cultural differences identified within international schools stem from teachers' national culture and the belief systems embedded within each person.

Defining Culture

There are many ways to define culture. The first published definition of culture dates back to 1891 in the book *Primitive Culture*, as Sir Edward B. Tylor offered the explanation, "That complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, 1891). Since then, the concept of culture has been defined and redefined, as anthropological researchers delve deeper into culture's influence. Over a century later, Hodge (2000) defined culture as:

A mosaic of patterns established by repeated practice. Each of these patterns met a need or solved a problem at a certain point in a people's history. Culture is this accumulation of life experiences spanning generations. For a native, finding a way through this maze of interconnecting paths is second nature, but to an outsider who hasn't learned the paths and doesn't know where the ones that are visible lead, getting across the landscape of another culture is an enigma. (p. 27)

Peterson and Deal (1998) describe culture as the underground stream of standards, norms, values, customs, and traditions that develop over time as individuals work together, face

challenges, and solve problems. This concept is magnified within an international school, where culture plays a vital role in collaborating effectively and understanding pedagogical processes.

Hofstede (2001) defined culture as mental programming and suggested that we are all programmed by social values, beliefs, traditions, and life experiences that influence our perception. This concept indicates that people who grow up in different cultures with different social norms will form different behaviors and modes of thinking (Sims, 2011). These cultural differences build a foundation of how people understand and perceive life experiences. As one gets older, thoughts and perceptions become more defined, but still rest on the foundation of culture.

Research on National Culture

As an IBM International management trainer and head of personnel research, Geert Hofstede was tasked with collecting IBM employee opinion surveys as a means to identify attitudes and values within the company. Between 1967 and 1978, Hofstede conducted one of the most complete research studies that focused on how work values are influenced by national culture (Hofstede, 2001; McSweeney, 2002). After collecting over 116,000 responses from 40 different countries, Hofstede began his initial analysis of the data (Hofstede, 2001). At the time, research within the social sciences and business studies consisted of survey research, but had not been utilized in cross-cultural comparisons (Bing, 2004). Throughout the 1980s, Hofstede expanded on his research, resulting in a study of 93 countries and ultimately adding two categories to his national culture paradigm. Though his research was initially applied to multinational businesses, due to globalization, the study has since been adapted to a wide variety of multicultural organizations.

Criticism of Hofstede's Research

Despite the recognition of Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, his research and cultural proclamations do have critics. McSweeney (2002) claimed that Hofstede has added to his research, but has not admitted to limitations or significant errors in his study. In large part, criticism focuses on overvaluing Hofstede's research, misinterpretation of the findings, and the absence of individual behavior.

In the human sciences, the concept of culture is argued regularly. Given this, critics discount the validity of Hofstede's research, contending that culture is an elusive and contradictory variable that "does not equate with nations" (Baskerville, 2003, p. 6). Ailon (2008) suggested that Hofstede reduced the concept of culture to values, which were then condensed to norms collected by a questionnaire at IBM. McSweeney (2002) further argued that Hofstede generalized cultures from a population that did not necessarily represent their nation. In response, Hofstede (2002) posited that culture, along with values and dimensions, do not exist, but are merely constructs that are useful to explain and predict behaviors.

Hofstede's (1983) methodology has also been called into question. Critics argue that surveys or questionnaires are not appropriate for measuring cultural dispositions, particularly since behavior and actions can be subjective (Jones, 2007). Moreover, critics contend Hofstede's (1983) research assumes a population is homogenous, relying on the notion that culture is shared and common to all individuals within a nation and implying that his research excludes ethnic groups (Jones, 2007; McSweeney, 2002). Critics also note that culture is not necessarily bound by borders and is more often fractured and fluid, which questions Hofstede's (1983) use of "nations" as a unit of measurement (Jones, 2007; McSweeney, 2002). McSweeney (2002) also argued that Hofstede's (1983) findings are not representative of national culture, but rather data

collected from situational opinions in one organization. Hofstede (2002) addressed such criticism, suggesting that surveys should not be the only way to measure cultural differences and any set of equivalent samples from national populations could provide information about cultural differences.

In spite of the criticism, Hofstede's (1983) research has maintained value and recognition within cross-cultural studies. Triandis claimed, it "has become the standard against which new work on cultural differences is validated" (as cited in Ailon, 2008, p. 886). Regardless of one's stance on Hofstede's (2001) research, it remains one of the most valuable pieces of work regarding culture and cultural tendencies (Jones, 2007). Research in cross-cultural studies will likely continue its significant growth, especially as globalization continues its expansion and the need for cultural intelligence becomes necessary in international organizations. Hofstede's research can, at minimum, provide a foundation for understanding multicultural organizations and its employees.

Professional Learning Communities

A professional learning community (PLC) is an ongoing process of collaboration where educators utilize collective inquiry and action research in order to promote student learning and achievement (DuFour & DuFour, 2012; Huffman & Hipp, 2003). PLCs are not new to education and have become commonplace in many schools seeking to promote school reform. Stuart (2016) suggested that PLCs could make bad schools good, and good schools great. Hord (1997) stated that teachers working in a professional learning community "are more likely to be consistently well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired so that they inspire students" (p. 32). The research supporting PLCs in schools dates back more than thirty years, providing a solid foundation for the effectiveness of the process.

Certainly, the overall mission of PLCs is intended to increase student achievement, but such a pursuit requires colleagues to collaborate effectively. Voelkel (2011) acknowledged the many variables and structures that make up a PLC as:

Strong site leadership; shared vision and mission; teacher empowerment; teachers having requisite skills; teacher teams working collaboratively to examine student work, setting clear and specific instructional goals aligned to student academic needs; and teacher teams using data to evaluate the effectiveness of pedagogy. (p. 18)

In the context of an international school, these PLC terms and functions are “culturally laden,” making what they mean and how they are interpreted reliant on cultural dispositions (Toole and Louis, 2001). Even the use of acronyms, unfamiliar pedagogical concepts, or anecdotes can be problematic (Allen, 2011). Moreover, new initiatives introduced in PLCs can be difficult due to the multicultural make-up of the group.

Overview of Professional Learning Communities and Culture

While there is not one universal definition of a PLC, each share common characteristics and attributes that increase their effectiveness. DuFour and Eaker (1998), well-known proponents of the PLC model in schools, identified six key characteristics of effective PLCs: (1) shared mission, vision, and values, (2) collective inquiry, (3) collaborative teams, (4) action orientation and experimentation, (5) continuous improvement, and (6) results orientation. Blankenship and Ruona (2007) suggested that the DuFour and Eaker (1998) PLC model is a framework from which school faculty can begin to shift the culture of their school in order to build capacity for collaboration and organizational change.

Shared mission, vision, and values. PLCs thrive when there is a collective commitment to guiding principles and values that illustrate what teachers believe in and what they seek to

create (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Bringing teachers together, PLCs function best when they share a mission, a vision, and values. DuFour and Eaker (1998) note, “What separates a learning community from an ordinary school is its collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what the people in the school believe and what they seek to create” (p. 25). Creating a shared vision and adhering to shared values is a key component to building trust within the multicultural staff. However, people from cultures that view others as untrustworthy take longer to establish trust and many cultures differ in how truth is established and what is valued among a group (Bird & Osland, 2005). In addition, PLCs within an international school can struggle, as culture can influence how these terms are interpreted, defined, or perceived.

Collective inquiry. “The engine of improvement, growth, and renewal in a PLC is collective inquiry” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 25). A successful PLC contains participants who question the status quo, seek new methods, learn from failure, and reflect on the process (DuFour & Eker, 1998; Hord, 1997). Collective inquiry promotes curiosity and openness toward new ideas, which in turn, allows PLC members to develop new understandings and knowledge. Yet, in some countries, “questioning the status quo” is not culturally accepted or ingrained. The process of searching for answers and the belief that the search is more important than the answer itself is not universally accepted either. Furthermore, the collective search might not be easy for those who culturally value individuality.

Collaborative teams. Collaboration is at the heart of successful PLCs. DuFour and Eaker (1998) posited, “People who engage in collaborative team learning are able to learn from one another, thus creating momentum to fuel continued improvement” (p. 27). The importance of collaboration should not be understated, as it is the foundation by which PLCs are established. Collaborative teams imply a shared leadership rather than a hierarchy. Anderson (2010) argues,

because international schools often hire teachers from a variety of nationalities, staff members can perceive leadership in different ways.

Action-orientation and experimentation. Successful PLCs are action-oriented and unafraid to experiment with new initiatives and ideas. DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggested PLC members are often tasked with developing, testing, evaluating theories and innovations, and reflecting on what happened, then begin the cycle again. DuFour and Eaker (1998) argued successful PLCs “recognize that learning always occurs in a context of taking action, and they believe engagement and experience are the most effective teachers (p. 27). Apart from action, the notion to experiment is essential in PLCs, as teachers seek out new avenues for improvement, prepared to learn from the results. This process can be difficult to overcome for those practitioners culturally ingrained with a fear of failure or dishonor.

Continuous improvement. As PLC members work together toward new understandings and knowledge, continuous improvement is provoked. DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggested each PLC member engage in four key questions: (1) What is our fundamental purpose? (2) What do we want to achieve? (3) What are our strategies for becoming better? (4) What criteria will we use to assess our improvement efforts? These proposed key questions directly relate to the aforementioned PLC attributes, as each promotes collaboration, shared mission and values, experimentation, and action. While these guiding questions support the notion of continuous improvement, it fails to address the cultural relevance of traditional teaching still practiced in many parts of the world. International teachers often teach based on their native country’s educational ideologies and teaching practices, which are linked to their national culture.

Results orientation. Successful PLCs are results oriented, meaning assessing and evaluating improvement based on results, rather than intention, is necessary. DuFour and Eaker

(1998) explained, “Unless initiatives are subject to ongoing assessment on the basis of tangible results, they represent random groping in the dark rather than purposeful improvement” (p. 29). Assessing PLC initiatives is critical to ensuring long-term success. However, maintaining an ongoing process could be difficult for cultures that value short-term success.

Cultural Context and Collaboration

Hallinger and Kantamara (2001) identified the need to explore cultural influence within the context of education and focused their research on public schools in Thailand. Though the selected schools are not identified as international, the relevance of the study relates to cultural understandings and embedded social behaviors. Approximately 140 schools were reviewed but only three were chosen for a case study on successful school change. The schools selected had taken part in a systematic school reform project designed by Thailand’s Ministry of Education, which intended to implement a more Western approach to teaching and learning. Teachers met in PLCs to discuss school improvement initiatives and focus on pedagogical shifts for the classroom. Hallinger and Kantamara (2001) utilized Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions theory and were able to generate and propose ideas toward cultural norms and the nature of change in Thai schools.

Identifying the dimensions of Thai culture provided insight into the process of change and the influence of national culture. Hofstede (2001) found that Thailand scored high in the power-distance index, which is illustrated in its strongly hierarchical and bureaucratic society. This cultural aspect and “mental programming” of the Thai teachers allowed for change, but the pathway to get there needed to be explicitly stated to the teachers (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001; Hofstede, 2001). In return, those directives were accepted without question. Such questions “would suggest unacceptable public disagreement with someone of higher rank, age or status”

(p. 391). Accepting explicit directives without questioning lends credence to Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory but recognizing a hierarchy within a PLC is contradictory to the characteristic of shared leadership identified by DuFour and Eaker (1998). Authority, as it is related to collaboration and PLCs, is not based on power and top-down instruction, but instead, tasks should be divided according to teachers' expertise and interest (Jäppinen, Leclerc, & Tubin, 2015). The shared leadership structure of PLCs intends to shift responsibility to teachers, but unfortunately, this concept can be lost on individuals from countries with a high power-distance index.

Hallinger and Kantamara (2001) also recognized the collectivist culture of Thailand and touched on the relationship with collaboration. The Thai employees embraced the change as a group, rarely using the pronoun "I," rather using "we" as their primary point of reference for the intended change (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001; Hofstede, 2001). This distinction of culture can make the process of change and collaboration somewhat fluid, as employees set aside personal values for what is best for the collective. Although, there are times where cultural tendencies or beliefs conflict with the idea of collaboration. Jäppinen et al. (2015) suggested that collaboration and the "collective intelligence" requires, not only the sharing of best practices, but also classroom visits and observations from colleagues. Culturally, peer observations or evaluations can blur the line of hierarchy and the roles of leader and follower, which can be difficult for high power-index countries (Jäppinen et al., 2015). However, the fundamentals of collaboration speak well to those from a collectivist culture. Ultimately, Hallinger and Kantamara (2001) found that there are cultural differences in response to change that developed from cultural values and social norms that shape human behavior.

Professional Learning Communities in International Schools

Within the context of an international school, there are many personalities and experiences to consider when implementing PLCs. Curnett (2016) stated, “there are Grand Canyons of pedagogical and ideological differences...between international education and U.S. public school education...” (p. 37). Just as people are a product of their environment, teaching beliefs and methodologies are often a result of pedagogical training.

Toole and Louis (2002) asserted that there are inherent tensions to implementing PLCs within the context of international schools, one being the tension of national culture and its support or constraint over collegial relationships. One of the main reasons it is difficult to implement new educational practices from one country to another is that they are often bound by a deep set of cultural assumptions and influences (Toole & Louis, 2002). Given these “cultural assumptions,” when developing PLCs, international school leaders might experience barriers between the norms of multiple cultures and the norms of the institution (Toole & Louis, 2002). This concept is apparent in international schools, as teachers from Western countries, such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom move abroad and carry with them the Westernized teaching strategies and pedagogical beliefs. Group dynamics play a vital role in PLCs, as international teachers must cope with a specific system, making how they cope a significant factor in an international PLC (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Establishing a fully-functional PLC can be arduous, as foreign colleagues are often not accustomed to the ideas and hold a separate set of educational values and beliefs based on their national culture. Hallinger and Kantamara (2001) suggested that school improvement initiatives, such as PLCs, are venturing outside of their origins and into cultures and educational systems where a separate set of national norms, values, and understandings need to adjust. This idea is an

added challenge that international schools must consider when moving towards and maintaining PLCs.

Implementing Professional Learning Communities in an International School

Fahrney, Stuart, Pratt, and Hoss, (2016) discussed the process of implementing PLCs at the Singapore American School (SAS). The school, which boasts 375 teaching staff, serves nearly 4,000 students and represents 18 countries (Singapore American School, 2017, December 1). The school began the PLC implementation journey in 2006 with their elementary school and in 2011 in their middle and high schools.

According to Fahrney et al. (2016) every teacher, assistant, and administrator at SAS participated in a series of data collection methods, which included surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. One high school employee who played a significant role in PLC implementation at SAS was an educational assistant and expatriate whose spouse works in Singapore (Fahrney et al. 2016). For some international schools, education assistants are local hires from the city or surrounding area in which the school is located. While this makes for a positive relationship with the local community, it also brings in varied cultural and educational beliefs. An essential aspect to consider here is that the education assistant at SAS is familiar with and understands Western education systems and focuses on building positive relationships with students, but still holds them accountable for their “lack of will to attend to their learning gaps” (p. 173). This Western education intelligence provided the assistant the tools to push the process of PLCs among the locally hired teachers and illustrates the value of cultural competency in an international school setting.

A key component on which Fahrney et al. (2016) failed to elaborate was the obstacles and barriers faced, particularly regarding cultural predispositions. However, Fahrney et al.

(2016) do acknowledge that “many faculty members had different ideas of what PLCs are, based on past experience or misconceptions” (p. 175). Though the misconceptions could be attributed to multiple factors, considering the teacher demographics of SAS, it is plausible that differences in cultural values played a role in the struggles with implementation.

Exploring the Singaporean culture and local hires at SAS, some sense can be found within Hofstede’s six dimensions. According to Hofstede (2001), Singaporeans score high on the (74) Power Distance matrix. Correspondingly, Hallinger and Kantamara (2001) suggested, “The impact of high-power distance on leadership and school improvement processes in Thailand is enormous and is shared, to a large degree, by other Asian cultures” (p. 391). Asian countries, by and large, share similar beliefs based on a long history and tradition in religious and ideological values. Like many Eastern countries, Singapore falls in line with the teachings of Confucius and the concept that stability in society is based on unequal relationships (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). Hofstede (2001) found that power is “centralized” among Singaporeans and employees expect to be told what to do. Singaporean culture is very organized and systematic; workers are extremely disciplined and do not typically take initiative (Gibbs, 2009). While this attribute typically falls outside of the spirit of professional learning communities, it can certainly be a positive characteristic in the PLC process. Members of such cultures rarely, if ever, question leaders within an organization, and instead, are eager for direction and have a mental foundation of “Nation before community and society above self” (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010).

A correlation can also be found in Hofstede’s (2001) category of Individualism/Collectivism. Singapore scores high as a collectivistic society, making decisions for the good of the group, rather than the individual (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). Hofstede (2001) notes the second comparison to the principles of Confucius, believing the

individual is not a person, but a member of the family who must overcome individuality and restrain themselves in order to maintain harmony. Though Fahrney et al. (2016) do acknowledge struggles during the PLC implementation process, the cultural understanding of the educational assistant certainly made the transition smoother than most schools.

The Need for Cultural Understanding in International Schools

In the context of international schools, multiple cultures converge in order to promote student achievement and establish a positive organizational culture. To succeed as a member of a foreign culture, one must have self-knowledge and an understanding of cultural differences in terms of work values and goals (Routamaa & Hautala, 2008). Saint-Jacques (2012) argued, “Multicultural or intercultural communication cannot be learned without intercultural understanding, which is based on the knowledge of culture” (p. 51). Understanding cultural values and behaviors becomes essential, particularly for teachers and administrators who push new initiatives and promote change. School leaders coming from an individualistic culture might have difficulty implementing new initiatives while utilizing transformational leadership (Routamaa & Hautala, 2008). Likewise, teachers from a feminine culture might balk at school changes that require longer hours, as they value leisure time (Routamaa & Hautala, 2008). These cultural differences can be a challenge for school leaders, though an understanding of cultural dimensions, values, and knowledge of relationships (Routamaa & Hautala, 2008) can help overcome these perceived cultural obstacles.

For international school leaders, cultural understanding and collaboration is key for a positive organizational culture. Abramson and Moran (2018) suggested, “To create opportunities for collaboration, leaders must learn not only the customs, courtesies, and business protocols of theory counterparts from other countries, but also understand the national character, management

philosophies, and mindsets of the people” (p. 23). In an international school setting, cultural intelligence leads to more effective school leadership and the concept “should be an important consideration in selecting international school leaders, in training and professional development of international school leaders, in integrating cultural intelligence into higher education curriculum, and in domestic educational contexts” (Keung, 2011, p. 106). As school leaders develop and practice cultural intelligence, systems are set in place to promote collaboration. PLCs are a prime example of collaboration within international schools. However, given the cultural diversity, effective professional learning communities can be extremely difficult to implement.

Conclusion

Though culture can be defined in many ways, the literature suggests that one’s national culture provides a foundation for future behaviors, personality, and beliefs. One’s thinking is partly influenced by factors of national culture, including life experiences, family, education, and organizations, which are not the same across country borders (Hofstede, 1983). It is through this “mental programming” and conditioning that one interprets new experiences in a certain way (Hofstede, 1983). Consequentially, in a multicultural organization, this can lead to cultural differences and subconscious assumptions (Fullan, 2018) that can stifle collaboration and productivity.

Hofstede’s (2001) research offered scholars and practitioners valuable insight into cross-cultural relationships (Jones, 2007). Hofstede’s (2001) six dimensions of culture provide a reasonable and sound avenue for multicultural organizations to identify the role that national culture might play. Moreover, Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions theory can help organizations develop strategies to overcome cultural barriers and misunderstandings.

Though Hofstede's (2001) work was groundbreaking in the social science arena, it did not escape criticism from academics interested in discrediting his research. Perhaps the most obvious criticism is related to cultural homogeneity and individualism (Jones, 2007). Hofstede (2001) explained, when considering citizens of a nation on a bell curve, the vast majority will likely fall within the normal distribution, though there are bound to be anomalies that fall outside the norm. While it is evident that Hofstede's research did not consider, nor intended to consider, individual personalities, the six dimensions do easily cast a foundation that helps explain actions and behaviors of a collective. Given this, Hofstede's (2001) findings did support the need for cultural understanding within a multicultural organization.

In the field of education, international schools easily embody the characteristics of a multicultural organization. The reviewed literature shows that, in the context of an international school, faculty members' actions and beliefs can be tied to one's culture. The diverse demographics of teachers, who bring with them a cultural identity representative of various nations, often have embedded pedagogical beliefs, teaching practices, and ideas of collaboration.

PLCs provide an avenue to initiate or improve collaboration among international schools. Though difficult to implement in any context, effective PLCs are the most powerful strategy for creating a collaborative culture and establishing collective responsibility that improves teaching and learning (Lewis, Asberry, DeJarnett, & King, 2016). The literature shows that there are "culturally grounded differences" in people's responses "derived from cultural values and norms" and are based on a deeper set of ideological beliefs about education, which suggests a need for new strategies when implementing and functioning PLCs in an international school (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001; Talbert, 2010; Toole & Louis, 2001). "The development of PLCs therefore sometimes depends not only on assumptions about how teachers learn, but also on a

deeper set of values that a country holds about political ideology, the goals of education, the proper role of teachers, and power” (Toole & Louis, 2001, p. 272). In the context of an international school, utilizing Hofstede’s (2001) six dimensions of culture can be an effective means to understand these cultural differences and develop cultural intelligence, particularly when establishing a collaborative program such as PLCs.

Chapter 3 addresses the purpose of the study, presents the research questions, and provides insight and a rationale for the research design. Information about the research site and target population is also given. The sampling method to identify appropriate participants for the study, as well as the reasoning behind the sampling method is provided. Selected instruments and data collection procedures are described. Chapter 3 also notes the value and reasoning for a pilot study. Data analysis procedures, including coding methods and triangulation of data, are also presented. Identified limitations to the study, as well as delimitations, are presented, as are methods to increase credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the study. Procedures to address ethical issues and ensure participant confidentiality are also discussed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

When it comes to establishing effective professional learning communities in an international school setting, cultural differences preclude any “paint-by-number” plan that educators can follow (Toole & Louis, 2002, p. 259). Therefore, PLC facilitators need to be cognizant of and adapt for the cultural values and tendencies that exist within a multicultural faculty (Toole & Louis, 2002). People from different cultures might share basic concepts, but oftentimes view them from different perspectives, which can influence their behavior in a manner that others may consider irrational or contradictory (Lewis, 2005). These different perspectives, shaped by cultural backgrounds, can stifle the collaborative processes and functionality of intercultural PLCs. In order to avoid these cultural calamities, cultural understanding must be practiced throughout the school. This means that all teachers in the organization should develop an “unconscious competence in dealing with cross-cultural issues and have an internalized map that allows one to deal naturally with differing cultural terrains” (Hodge, 2000, p. 25). Recognizing the influence of culture can provide a foundation for international teachers to develop a foundation of cultural understanding and help develop strategies to address differing cultural tendencies and values found among colleagues.

In developing PLCs, international educators may experience tension between cultural norms and the norms required for effective implementation (Toole & Louis, 2002). This qualitative instrumental case study sought to explore the influence of culture through the lens of Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions theory and illuminate the issue of cultural values and tendencies in the context of intercultural PLCs. Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory identified six dimensions of culture relating to inequality, change, collaboration, perceived gender roles,

value of traditions, and desires (Sanderson, 2007). This study collected and analyzed data from one-on-one interviews, field notes, and a demographic questionnaire to explore the influence of culture within the context of an intercultural PLC.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore the influence of culture on intercultural PLCs in an international school. Klein (2015) suggested that examining the concept of cultural tendencies in a multicultural organization is valuable in that it can offer incredible benefits for the diverse staff. Exploring the influence of national culture in intercultural PLCs at an international school can offer insight, “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” (Toole & Louis, 2002, p. 247). The multicultural demographic of the teaching staff offers a unique opportunity for teachers to share best practices and collaborate with colleagues, though “from an international perspective, this hypothesis may be surprisingly heretical in many countries” (p. 248). Exploring the influence of culture in an intercultural PLC can provide insight into functionality and effectiveness, especially for international schools.

While international administrators are expected to possess some level of cultural awareness and competence, teachers serving in a leadership capacity might lack the international experience or leadership practice to fully grasp the cultural differences of colleagues. Given the leadership structure of PLCs, an understanding of cultural values and tendencies within the PLC becomes necessary. Exploring this phenomenon through the lens of Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions theory while focusing on DuFour and Eaker’s (1989) attributes of successful PLCs

can provide PLC members and facilitators essential insight into the cultural tendencies of colleagues and suggest strategies to maximize PLC functionality and effectiveness.

Research Questions

This study was designed as a qualitative instrumental case study and intended to explore the influence of national culture of K-12 international teachers in an international school PLC.

The focus of this study is to address the following research questions:

1. What characteristics of professional learning communities, as defined by DuFour and Eaker (1998), are influenced by international teachers' cultural values identified in Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory?
2. What strategies can K-12 teachers employ to better facilitate the functionality and effectiveness of an international school PLC?

Research Design

This study was a qualitative instrumental case study. The philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research are rooted in constructivism, which "assumes that reality is socially constructed," and suggests, "there are multiple realities or interpretations of a single event" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). Qualitative researchers are concerned with understanding how people perceive and interpret reality and the meaning that is shaped from experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study explored the influence of national culture and cultural tendencies in intercultural PLCs through the perspective of K-12 international teachers. Perceptions of participants combined with interpretations of the researcher helped identify the extent of influence that national culture might have in PLC functionality and effectiveness.

A case study is an in-depth exploration and investigation of a contemporary phenomenon contained by a bounded system and within its real-life context (Creswell, 2015; Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014). Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) expanded this idea explaining, a case study is a type of inquiry that seeks to explore issues or phenomena through interaction with research participants, which can provide an in-depth understanding of the study. A key component in a case study is the exploration of a bounded system, one in which is confined by common attributes (Creswell, 2015). This case study was bounded by time, setting, context, and participants, and intended to focus on a specific issue, which made the design appropriate.

Creswell (2015) described an instrumental case study as a qualitative study that concentrates on a specific issue within a case and “serves the purpose of illuminating that issue” (p. 469). However, this understanding requires a definition of issue. Stake (2010) suggested, “Issues are not simple and clean, but intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts” (p. 17). For an instrumental case study, the issue is dominant (Stake, 2010). This research was an instrumental case study because it focused on national culture and the cultural tendencies often found in an international school PLC.

In order to address the first research question, this study explored the influence of teachers’ national culture within the context of an intercultural PLC. Given the “illuminating” nature of an instrumental case study design, the focus of this research was to delve into the underlying or embedded cultural values of teachers in an intercultural PLC and explore the influence those values might have in regard to collaboration, leadership structure, and acceptance of organizational change (Creswell, 2015). The study illuminated the cultural values and tendencies of K-12 international teachers defined by Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions within the context of a PLC using collected data from a demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and direct observation. The data gleaned from the data collection methods

and the findings of this study provided necessary insight and direction to address the second research question.

Site Information and Population

The research took place at an international school located in the European Union. The International School of Europe (ISE) (pseudonym) is a fully accredited educational institution and assures all enrolled students receive an academic program that meets the highest international standards. In order to ensure students reach the highest standards, teachers must be committed to continuous and consistent school improvement initiatives and professional development. These concepts are often achieved through the school's version of PLCs.

Currently, ISE has a version of a PLC in place, known by teachers as Collaborative Planning Teams (CPTs). Much like PLCs in other schools, the CPTs at the research site address student concerns, push for curriculum alignment, allow the sharing of best practices, and promote school improvement initiatives. For the purpose of this study, PLCs will be referred to as CPTs during the data collection and analysis phase.

There is not one singular definition of a PLC, implying that the function and characteristics of each PLC are dependent on the school and teachers involved. The CPTs at ISE reflect DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics, though in varying degrees. According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), effective PLCs function through: (1) shared mission, vision, and values, (2) collective inquiry, (3) collaborative teams, (4) action orientation and experimentation, (5) continuous improvement, and (6) results orientation.

Each CPT is guided by the school's shared mission of developing tomorrow's world citizens through a vision of being empowered together. CPTs also serve as an avenue toward collective inquiry, considered "the engine of improvement, growth and renewal in PLCs"

(DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 25). Collective inquiry is the collaborative process where teachers share best practices and educational knowledge while learning together and from each other (Jackson, 2013). CPTs are also geared toward enacting change and promoting innovative ideas that can improve the school. Continuous improvement is identified through shared experiences and best practices, a key benefit of PLCs in an international school (Stuart, 2016). CPTs intend to be results oriented, as collaborative efforts are driven by student success and the school's transfer goals.

According to the school's website, the institution employs approximately 60 full-time teaching staff and support specialists from ten different countries. The teacher population at the school is largely made up of expatriates from the United States, European Union, and Canada. The official language of the organization is English and all classes, besides foreign languages, are taught in English.

To satisfy the purpose of this research, the target population for this study was K-12 full-time international teachers who represented different nationalities and attend weekly CPT meetings at ISE. The target participants of the study represented different nationalities, including, but not limited to, the United States, Italy, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom, France, and Canada. In order to avoid possible conflicts of interest, the researcher's CPT was excluded from the primary research, as were teachers who are involved in the humanities CPT.

In an effort to recruit research participants, site permission was obtained, and then a simple interest letter was emailed prior to the study to all other full-time K-12 teachers who attend weekly CPT meetings. The letter included a brief description of the research and offered an option for interest in the study. After interested participants were identified, a small group meeting was scheduled to provide a more comprehensive description of the study. For those who

were not available for the meeting, a one-on-one meeting was scheduled for convenience. Interested teachers then confirmed their participation in the study.

Sampling Method

The aim of this study was to illuminate and explore the influence of national cultural in an international PLC. Identifying appropriate research participants was critical in order to conduct an in-depth exploration of the influence of national culture in PLCs. Non-random purposeful sampling is a strategy used to extract “appropriate data that fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints and challenges being faced” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 148). Given the purpose of this study and the design of the research, purposeful sampling offered an appropriate participant sample for an in-depth exploration of the influence of national culture.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that purposeful sampling assumes the researcher wants to explore, understand, and gain insight, which requires an appropriate sample from which the most can be learned. In order to gain the most insight and in-depth understanding of the influence of national culture in PLCs, maximum variation sampling was used. Maximum variation sampling is a purposeful sampling strategy where research participants are characteristically different (Creswell, 2015). Since the focus of this research is on the influence of national cultural in PLCs, full-time teachers who represent different countries were vital for the study.

Self-selection sampling also played a role in identifying participants for this study. According to Sharma (2017), self-selection sampling is appropriate when participants volunteer to take part in research rather than being approached and asked. The benefits of self-selection sampling include reducing the amount of time necessary to identify participants who meet the

selection criteria, increased commitment, and a greater willingness to offer insight into the focus of the study (Sharma, 2017). Though there are benefits to self-selection sampling, the method could also produce self-selection bias, where participants might harbor negative personal opinions and provide biased responses during data collection (Sharma, 2017). The criteria for participants of this study included teachers who take part in weekly CPT meetings, are full-time employees, and reflect different cultural backgrounds. Teachers who aligned with the selection criteria then volunteered to take part in this study and offer insight as research participants.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedures

This was a qualitative study based on an instrumental case study design. Creswell (2013) notes, the characteristic of a good qualitative case study is that it presents an in-depth understanding of the case through several forms of data. In the spirit of case study data collection, this study collected multiple data sets from a demographic questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and direct observation to explore the influence of national culture on teachers in PLCs.

Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) was used in the initial phase of the research study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) suggested a demographic questionnaire is necessary to help determine underlying perceptions, as well as similarities and differences of perceptions among research participants. The demographic questionnaire identified participant nationality, gender, international school experience, and number of years teaching. As this study was bounded to one organization, the demographic questionnaires were printed and delivered by the researcher to each participant. Participants then completed the demographic questionnaires prior to one-on-one interviews. The primary purpose of this collected data was to categorize participants into

appropriate cultural dimensions defined by Hofstede's (2001) theory and to gain insight into participant background.

One-on-One Interviews

Once the demographic questionnaire was completed, one-on-one semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) were conducted and recorded to capture participant responses to interview questions in descriptive detail. Interviews offered insight into culture as a way of thinking (Saint-Jacques, 2012). This meaning of culture, often referred to as "covert culture," incorporates modes of perception, beliefs and values and is not easily observable, but can be identified in how one thinks and understands (Saint-Jacques, 2012). Interviews were recorded using a secured iPhone voice recorder and backed-up on a password protected MacBook. Semi-structured interview questions typically work from a thematic framework, but also allow for new ideas to be explored during the interview process, depending on the response of the interviewee, which will allow responses to flow more naturally and offer an opportunity for elaboration (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Questions provided during interviews were thematically linked to Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions and directly related to DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of effective PLCs. Interviews took place in each participant's classroom or chosen setting in an effort to provide a comfortable atmosphere. Interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes, though additional time was scheduled as needed.

The interviews focused on Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions as they relate to DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of effective PLCs. In order to address Hofstede's (2001) power distance index, interview questions related to CPT leadership. In order to gauge cultural tendencies from the individualism versus collectivism dimension, questions regarding collaboration were asked. Interview questions also discussed participant assertiveness in CPTs as

a means to identify influence from masculine or feminine societies. Participants were also asked about organizational change and teaching practices in an effort to explore the uncertainty avoidance index and the long-term versus short-term orientation dimensions. Interviews also included questions about communication, particularly in regard to feedback and opinions, in order to understand the indulgence versus restraint dimension.

Direct Observation

A third method of data collection came from direct observations (Appendix C). Livermore (2015) posited, “certain aspects of culture are visible which serve as cues for cultural differences, but the most important points of understanding are the beliefs, values, and assumptions that lie beneath the surface of what’s visible” (p. 75). Stake (2010) suggested that observations can provide a greater understanding of the case. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) added that observation is a fundamental method in qualitative research and is used to discover and explain complex interactions and behaviors. Direct observation of CPTs provided insight into participant nonverbal communications during meetings and identified correlations with cultural dimensions. In this sense, the observation method was conducted with an emphasis on discovery, which can potentially unearth patterns of behavior that are culturally relevant (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Nonverbal communications include CPT participation, assertiveness, reactions to leadership, and collaborative behaviors. As Stake (2010) suggested, notes were taken during observations in order to provide a description of context for further analysis and expand the depth of data gathered.

Pilot Study

In order to increase dependability and decrease confirmation bias in the interview questions, a pilot study was conducted. Slavin (2007) explained a pilot study is conducted in

order to test data collection instruments and identify issues that need to be addressed prior to the actual research study. The pilot test did not include possible research participants, but did take place in a similar environment. The pilot study for this research took place in the researcher's CPT, which is comprised of American, South African, Canadian, Polish, and British teachers.

The pilot study also improved data collection methods and the content of the data (Yin, 2018). The pilot study included the semi-structured interview protocol. Pilot study participants were tasked with identifying issues with word choice, question structure, chronological order of questions, and question clarity. Pilot study participants were also asked to provide specific opinions regarding each question and possible focus areas. The pilot study intended to improve data collection instruments, the interview protocol, question formatting, and ultimately support a more valid study.

Data Collection and Dimensions of Culture

This study explored the influence of culture in the context of an intercultural PLC at an international school. Using Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory as a lens, this instrumental case study utilized three methods for data collection: demographic questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and observations. Each collection method provided essential data for an in-depth exploration of the influence that culture has in an intercultural PLC.

The power distance index (PDI) focuses on the basic societal problem of inequality and measures the acceptance of unequal power distribution, interpersonal power, and organizational relationship power, best illustrated by organizational hierarchy (Hofstede, 2001; 2011). Kastner (2015) identified the democratic and shared leadership approach to PLCs, a cultural value that can be difficult for some to adapt. Interestingly, the PDI focuses on "the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like a family) accept and expect that power

is distributed unequally,” suggesting that inequality is defined and accepted from below rather than top (Hofstede, 2011, p. 9). The data related to this dimension offered insight into teachers’ perception of the shared leadership found in PLCs.

The uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) “indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations” (Hofstede, 2011, p. 10). Hofstede (2001, 2011) found that some cultures try to minimize these situations by establishing laws, rules, and a belief in absolute truth, motivated by emotions and a nervous energy. The data provided essential details about teachers’ position on organizational changes and shared personal practices.

Individualism versus collectivism (IDV) describes the relationship between the individual and the collective in a society. In an individualistic society, individuals are mainly concerned with self-interest and tend to look after himself or herself and their immediate family and work is aligned along the lines of fulfilling individualistic economic and psychological needs (Bissessar, 2018; Hofstede, 2011). Diametrically opposing this is a collectivism culture, where there is a cohesive and communal group and collaboration, teamwork, mutual dependence, loyalty and relationship building are the hallmarks (Bissessar, 2018). Given the collaborative nature of PLCs, the data related to this dimension was vital in terms of acceptance and collaboration.

Masculinity versus femininity (MAS) identifies the distributed roles between genders and the control of aggression (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Pedersen, 2012). In a masculine culture, men are expected to be assertive, competitive, and forthright while in a feminine society the genders are emotionally closer and competition is not openly endorsed (Hofstede et al., 2010). Considering this, PLC participants from masculine cultures could provoke unnecessary stress within the group through overly assertive language or behaviors.

Given the structure of PLCs, the MAS index provided a better understanding of the supportive conditions necessary for successful intercultural PLCs.

Long-term orientation versus short-term orientation (LTO) was added later in Hofstede's (2001) research and measures the value placed on traditions within a society. Cultures identified as long-term orientation believe the most important events in life are in the future, a good person adapts to situations, traditions are adaptable to circumstance, and attribute success to effort and failure to lack of effort (Hofstede, 2011). Short-term oriented cultures associate important events with the past or present and believe a good person is always the same, traditions are sacred, and success or failure is because of luck (Hofstede, 2011). In the context of PLCs, this dimension can help leaders identify who is adaptable regarding educational change and traditional pedagogical practice.

Indulgence versus restraint (IND) measures the extent by which people try to control their desires (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010.). Indulgent cultures value freedom of speech and leisure time while cultures of restraint hold back their desires and choose what is needed over what is wanted (Hofstede, 2011). The data related to this dimension offered an understanding of teachers' perception of effective communication in the PLC.

Data Analysis

Flick (2014) defined qualitative data analysis as, "the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it" (p. 5). As the aim of this study was to explore the influence of national culture in intercultural PLCs, the data collected was analyzed and explored through:

1. Cultural values and tendencies that relate to a particular Hofstede (2001) dimension.

2. The influence of national culture and cultural values on DuFour and Eaker's (1998) six characteristics of effective PLCs.

Collected data from interviews and direct observation notes were analyzed simultaneously using constant comparative analysis. Constant comparative analysis involves comparing data sets in order to develop concepts or themes of possible relationships found among data, typically through coding (Thorne, 2000). Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) explain, coding is a means to classify collected data in order to identify what is of interest or importance, then labeling and organizing the data into themes or categories. Essentially, this means to find a label that allows the grouping of several ideas under one concept, so that there are a limited number of codes (or categories) rather than a large variety of diverse phenomena (Flick, 2014). Coding identified connections between cultural tendencies and PLC characteristics.

The coding phase adapted Braun and Clark's (2012) six steps of thematic analysis: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Braun and Clark (2012) defined thematic analysis as a method for "systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set ..." to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences" (p. 57). In order to create relevant and interpretable codes, the process of thematic analysis was guided by the research questions and theoretical framework.

To become more familiar with interview data, transcripts were created using Rev.com online software. In order to increase familiarity with the data, interview recordings were listened to and transcripts read multiple times. During this phase, codes were generated to identify and label relevant data related to the research questions (Braun & Clark, 2012). The researcher then

conducted an initial review manually through holistic coding of the interview and field notes data and identified recurring patterns and emergent themes (Saldaña, 2016). The “chunking” of data into broad topics, specifically DuFour and Eaker’s (1989) effective PLC characteristics, did not only further familiarize the researcher with the data, it also provided a “big picture” understanding (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The initial review produced an overall list of initial codes.

A second review of the interview data involved the process of value coding through the online qualitative data analysis software Dedoose. Value coding reflects participants’ values, attitudes, and beliefs, which represents participants’ perspectives and is appropriate to explore cultural values and belief systems (Saldaña, 2016). Reviewing and exploring the data required an in-depth examination of participant interview responses and field notes.

Coded data was reviewed in an effort to identify emergent themes and similarities within the data. A table outlining candidate themes was produced and data extracts were collated prior to reviewing potential themes (Braun & Clark, 2012). Themes were then defined and named as an analysis of the themes. Thematic analysis allowed for emergent themes and recurring patterns to be related to Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions and tied to DuFour and Eaker’s (1989) characteristics of effective PLCs.

The data collected from the demographic questionnaire served to classify research participants in relation to Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimensions. The demographic questionnaire not only identified participants’ nationality, but also included international experience, years at selected school, age, and total years teaching. This additional data offered insight into the background of research participants and possible cross-cultural influences that may be relevant.

Analysis of questionnaire data provided insight into Hofstede's (2001) findings and identified the theoretical cultural tendencies of participant nationalities.

Interpretation played a significant role in observation data analysis. Though interpretation is inherently subjective, direct observations and assertions from data analysis can help make sense of the phenomenon and offer a better understanding of the issue (Stake, 2010). Notes produced during the direct observation phase also went through an initial review using holistic coding and a second review utilizing values coding. Data collected and coded from interviews and notes were compared to identify any similarities and discrepancies between participants' perceived cultural tendencies and observed behaviors. Collected data through this phase was directly linked to Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory and Dufour and Eaker's (1998) key characteristics of effective PLCs.

Limitations and Delimitations

As with any qualitative study, there were limitations to consider and delimitations to acknowledge. The identified limitations can influence data interpretation and findings of the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The delimitations of the study define the boundaries of the research and narrow the scope of the study.

Limitations

Given that qualitative research is largely built on constructivism, qualitative inquiry is inherently subjective. However, "Subjectivity is not seen as a failing needing to be eliminated but as an essential element of understanding" (Stake, 2010, p. 45), and one that drives curiosity, interpretation, and interests in qualitative research. Acknowledging limitations is critical in establishing a context of data interpretation. Limitations of this study include generalizability, sample size, time, and possible language barriers.

Yin (2018) noted, “Case studies, like experiments, are generalizable in theoretical propositions but not to populations or universes” (p. 20). Though this case study intended to highlight cultural tendencies within an intercultural PLC, the study might not be applicable in other international schools. Also, the small sample size of nationalities represented in the study might not accurately reflect the extent of cultural influences within any intercultural PLC. Moreover, the scope of the study was limited to one international school located in Europe with a diverse teacher population. Therefore, findings of this study might not be applicable to international schools that are comprised of a larger or completely monocultural teacher demographic.

Qualitative research typically involves some level of interpretation. Given this, the inherent subjectivity of interpretation should be considered as a possible limitation. Hofstede (2001) acknowledged this dilemma in cross-cultural research suggesting, “the values of the researcher determine to a large extent the way he or she observes, describes, classifies, understands, and predicts reality” (p. 15). Though all efforts were taken to ensure accurate data collection and analysis, how the data was perceived and interpreted relied solely on the researcher and the researcher’s values.

Preexisting relationships could also be considered a limitation. The study took place at an international school where the researcher was employed as a teacher and head of CPT for three years. Preexisting relationships with colleagues might have produced response bias or increased reflexivity, where participants’ responses reflected perceived desired results of the researcher rather than portraying participants’ reality, which could have skewed the interview data (Yin, 2018). In order to control possible bias, interview and observation notes and reflections were used, as well as member-checking procedures with interview transcripts.

Language skills and articulation were also considered a limitation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This research study included participants from various countries, some of who do not have English as a first or second official national language. While the official language at the research site is English and all teachers are recognized as fluent English speakers, there still remains a possibility that questions or responses were misunderstood or misconstrued, which could result in distorted data.

Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of national culture on professional learning communities in an international school. This study focused solely on K-12 full-time international teachers who take part in CPTs at ISE and excluded school personnel who do not serve in a full-time teaching capacity or do not regularly meet with CPTs, as they are not directly related to this study. Teaching assistants, as well as ISE librarians and student support specialists were also excluded from this study, as they serve ISE in a limited capacity or do not regularly meet with CPTs.

A noticeable exclusion from this study was ISE administration. Though school principals can play a key role in effective PLC implementation, it is ISE teachers who facilitate and take part in weekly sessions (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Given the focus of this case study on teachers' cultural tendencies in CPTs, school administrators fell outside the scope of this research. The collegial dichotomy in CPTs created a need to explore cultural understanding throughout international school staff, rather than only from school leaders.

Ensuring Trustworthiness

Given the subjective nature of qualitative research, data analysis and findings can be difficult to ensure accuracy and reliability. Lincoln and Guba (1986) used the terms credibility,

dependability, transferability, and confirmability to address issues regarding trustworthiness. These terms are used to replace reliability and validity, two concepts typically connected to quantitative research. Ensuring trustworthiness of this research study was recognized through the lens of the participants, the lens of the researcher, and the lens of the reader (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Credibility

Credibility, which refers to confidence of truth, is arguably the most important criterion to consider in qualitative research (Connelly, 2016). Credibility was increased through the lens of participants by member-checking procedures. Creswell and Miller (2000) explained this process as taking collected data and interpretations back to study participants for confirmation of the information and narrative account. The semi-structured interviews provided the bulk of the collected data. Audio files of each recorded interview were transcribed by the online professional service Rev.com. Transcribed interviews were shared with interview participants to ensure accuracy. Participants were requested to make notes or comments in the transcript margin, rather than modifying or altering dialogue. Throughout the member-checking process, participants were encouraged to confirm if their description made “made sense, whether they are developed with sufficient evidence, and whether the overall account is realistic and accurate” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Approved participant descriptors were included in the final narrative of the study.

The lens of the researcher was used to increase the credibility of the study through triangulation of collected data. Data triangulation is a process of using multiple sources to corroborate or clarify meaning and form themes or categories in a study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Yin, 2018). Using multiple methods of data collection, such as

interviews, demographic questionnaires, and direct observation, increases credibility and allows for an in-depth understanding of how teachers perceive the influence of national culture in PLCs. Interviews served as the primary data source and offered a detailed description of participants' perspective, while the demographic questionnaire and direct observation bolstered the collected interview data.

Transferability

The lens of the reader contributed to the transferability of the study. Transferability is “the extent to which findings are useful to persons in other settings and is different from other aspects of research in that readers actually determine how applicable the findings are to their situations” (Connelly, 2016, p. 435). To address transferability, descriptive language of the setting, participants, and themes was used to enable the reader to decide if the research could be applied in similar contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The purpose of thick, rich description was to provide the reader with a sense of an event they have experienced, or could experience, described in the study. Transferability is increased through vivid and detailed descriptions that intend to transport the reader into a setting or similar context (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The process of providing thick, rich descriptions included observing and expressing even the smallest of details in setting, behaviors, and emotions to create a complete and vivid perspective.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the degree to which the findings of the study could be confirmed and establishes that the data and interpretations are clearly derived from the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). To increase confirmability, an audit trail was kept throughout the research process, which described in detail the process of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data

(Creswell & Miller, 2000). Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested the audit trail became a product based on “data and reconstruction” during the data collection and analysis phases (p. 77).

Dependability

Dependability “refers to the stability of data over time...with the understanding stability of conditions depends on the nature of the study” (Connelly, 2016, p. 435). The audit trail also served to increase dependability, along with peer debriefing of collected data. Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested discussing data collection procedures with a competent and knowledgeable outside source can alleviate bias while offering another perspective.

Ethical Issues

Consideration for participants’ time was acknowledged and prioritized. All participants were required to read and sign a letter of consent prior to participating in the research study. All ethical considerations aligned with the research site, The University of New England, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and those defined by the European Union. Data protection was of the utmost importance. All participants were required to read and sign completed permissions of the collected data. Permissions included how the data was used, protected, and deleted. Given the study site is located within the European Union, data protection also followed the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and adhered to all mandates.

Data were stored on a password-protected Apple computer and encrypted using the systems FileVault 2 software. Collected data was only used for this research study and destroyed immediately after using GDPR deletion methods. In order to ensure privacy and to abide by the European Union General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), all collected data were encrypted and teachers, as well as the research site, were prescribed a pseudonym.

Conclusion

This instrumental case study focused on the influence of national culture of K-12 teachers in an international school PLC. Chapter 3 addressed the purpose of the study and introduced the research questions. The research design also introduced the rationale for the design. Detailed information about the study site and context of the research was provided. The target population of the study was also identified. The sampling method, including the rationale, was offered. The data collection instruments of demographic questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and observations were described. Procedures to avoid ethical issues and ensure participants' confidentiality were also discussed.

The researcher used multiple methods to increase the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of the study. A pilot study was completed prior to the interview phase to ensure questions were accurate and relatable. Member checking procedures confirmed the accuracy of the data and allowed participants to clarify any anomalies in the data. An audit trail in the form of memos and reflections was used to describe each process of the research method. Triangulation of multiple data collection methods was completed during the analysis phase of the study.

Findings of this case study contributed to the existing literature regarding cultural tendencies within a multicultural organization, as well as the research focused on PLCs. Research findings can also offer further insight into the influence that cultural differences have within the context of international school PLCs. Findings can also help the research site uncover the overlooked variable of national culture within CPTs and increase functionality and effectiveness to better serve ISE teachers and the school as a whole.

Chapter 4 provides the findings for this instrumental case study. The chapter reiterates the purpose of the study, the research questions, and includes a summary of the setting. Chapter 4 also offers participant demographics and descriptions. An overview of the methodology and data collection procedures, as well as the data analysis process, is also included. Chapter 4 then addresses the findings of the collected data through identified themes, subthemes, and a narrative account based on participant interview responses and direct observations.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Professional learning communities (PLCs) can function in different ways and are often dependent on perceived organizational needs as well as the PLC members who take part in the process. In an international school, where a common characteristic is a multicultural staff, PLCs become an intercultural process and members must consider different cultural values and beliefs in order to be effective. DuFour and Eaker (1998) posited, “A clear vision of what a learning community looks like and how people operate within it will offer insight into the steps that must be taken to transform a school in a learning community” (p. 25). Understanding the cultural differences within an intercultural PLC can offer school leaders, as well as teachers, insight to increase PLC functionality and success.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of this instrumental case study. The chapter first restates the purpose of the study, the research questions, and includes an overview of the setting and descriptions of research participants based on data collected from a demographic questionnaire. Chapter four also provides a synopsis of the methodology and data collection procedures, as well as the data analysis process. Finally, the chapter offers the findings of the data collection in four identified themes, four subthemes, and a narrative constructed from participant responses and direct observations.

Purpose of the Study

Samovar et al. (2012) postulated in order to relate effectively to people from diverse international cultures, one must be knowledgeable about the diversity of people from other cultures and one must respect that diversity. The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the influence of international K-12 teachers’ culture in intercultural PLCs at

an international school. This case study focused on one international school in the European Union with a culturally diverse teaching staff.

Research Questions

In response to limited research focused on national culture and PLCs in an international school context, this qualitative instrumental case study aimed to connect the concepts and explore the influence that culture might have in intercultural PLCs. In order to meet the objectives of this research, the researcher framed the study around two main research questions:

1. What characteristics of professional learning communities, as defined by DuFour and Eaker (1998), are influenced by international teachers' cultural values identified in Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory?
2. What strategies can K-12 teachers employ to better facilitate the functionality and effectiveness of an intercultural PLC at an international school?

Setting

This qualitative instrumental case study was bound by the research setting and the participants involved. This research was conducted at an international school located in the European Union. In order to maintain confidentiality, the school is referred to by the pseudonym International School of Europe (ISE). The school employs approximately 60 full-time teachers and support staff who represent ten different countries.

The school is a fully accredited educational institution and assures all enrolled students receive an education that meets the highest international standards. In order to ensure students reach the highest standards, teachers must be committed to continuous and consistent school improvement initiatives and professional development. These concepts are often achieved

through the school's version of PLCs, known by teachers and administrators as collaborative planning teams (CPTs).

Professional learning communities (PLCs) serve many purposes within a school. There is not one singular definition of a PLC, implying that the characteristics and functionality is dependent on the school and teachers involved. Notwithstanding the foregoing, successful PLCs share similar characteristics that promote collaboration and allow for collaborative opportunities to flourish. DuFour and Eaker (1998) identified six characteristics of effective PLCs: (1) shared mission, vision, and values, (2) collective inquiry, (3) collaborative teams, (4) action orientation and experimentation, (5) continuous improvement, and (6) results orientation.

Collaborative planning teams. In order for ISE to promote collaboration among staff members, the school implemented a version of PLCs three years ago, known by staff members as collaborative planning teams (CPTs). The CPTs intend to provide an opportunity for teachers to share best practices, offer feedback to colleagues, and implement changes to curriculum. The CPTs are separated into six groups: (1) Early years (2) elementary (3) humanities (4) languages (5) math and sciences and (6) the arts. Each CPT typically meets once per week, though there are some weeks that allow for extended or additional meeting time.

Participant Recruitment and Demographics

Prior to participant recruitment, the researcher received permission from the site and approval from the University of New England institutional review board. In order to recruit participants, an email was sent out to teachers detailing the research study. Due to the focus of the study, only full-time K-12 teachers who participate in weekly CPT meetings were targeted. Therefore, a total of 29 teachers were included in the recruitment email.

Of the 29 possible participants, 11 teachers responded to the recruitment email expressing interest. In an effort to maintain confidentiality among participants, one-on-one meetings were set up with each interested participant. The one-on-one meetings took place in prospective participants' classroom. Each meeting lasted approximately 10-15 minutes and offered possible participants an opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and the data collection methods. Upon completion of these meetings, all 11 teachers who showed initial interest opted to take part in the study. However, due to scheduling conflicts, one of the 11 interested teachers could not take part in the study, leaving a total of ten full-time K-12 teachers who take part in weekly CPT meetings as the research participants. Once the research participants were identified, another round of one-on-one meetings were set up in order to review and sign the participant consent form, complete the demographic questionnaire, and schedule one-on-one interviews.

Participant Demographics

The study consisted of 10 participants. The participants were recruited via email and responded through email or verbally regarding their interest in the research. The participants were all K-12 full-time teachers at the research site and regularly attend weekly CPT meetings. For the purpose of this study and to maintain confidentiality, research participants are referred to as "Teacher" followed by an assigned number. The research participants represent multiple nationalities, which include: American, Canadian, Polish, and French. Self-perceived alignment with nationality and cultural values vary among participants, as some declare to be extremely close and others claim to not identify with their native culture. Participants also represent different CPTs at the research site. Three participants attend the language CPT, five were members of the elementary CPT, one teacher was from the Arts CPT, and one was from the Math and Science CPT. Each participant received his or her education credentials from their

native country and has a minimum of nine years teaching experience. In addition, each participant has international experience, though it ranges widely from one year to over twenty years.

Table 2

Participant Demographic

Participant	Nationality	Self-Perceived Cultural Alignment	Age/Gender	Teaching Experience
Teacher 1	French	Extremely High	Withheld/F	40+ years
Teacher 2	French	Extremely High	45-49/F	20+ years
Teacher 3	American	Moderate	30-34/F	5+ years
Teacher 4	Polish	High	35-39/F	15+ years
Teacher 5	Polish	Low	40-44/F	10+ years
Teacher 6	American	High	40-44F	20+ years
Teacher 7	Polish	Average	30-34/F	10+ years
Teacher 8	Canadian	Average	50-54/F	25+ years
Teacher 9	American	High	40-44/M	20+ years
Teacher 10	Canadian	Average	35-39/M	10+ years

Table 2 illustrates essential data collected from the demographic questionnaire. In order to increase participant confidentiality, teachers were assigned specific number. Considering the focus of this research on teachers' culture, identifying each participant's nationality was critical. Participants' perceived alignment with their nationality offered teachers an opportunity for introspection on their self-perceived connection with the cultural values and tendencies of their native culture. This method of introspection aimed to bring awareness to how participants might

interpret and make sense of the work environment and provide a better understanding of self-perceived cultural expectations (Lavrakas, 2008). Identifying age, gender, and teaching experience offers context to the study and the educational knowledge teachers possess.

Table 3

Participant Demographic 2

Participant	CPT Affiliation	Time at Research Site	International Experience	Education Credentials
Teacher 1	Languages	20+ years	30+ years	France
Teacher 2	Languages	5+ years	20+ years	France
Teacher 3	Elementary	3+ years	5+ years	United States
Teacher 4	Languages	15+ years	15+ years	Poland
Teacher 5	Elementary	3+ years	3+ years	Poland
Teacher 6	Elementary	1+ years	1+ years	United States
Teacher 7	Math/Science	5+ year	5+ year	Poland
Teacher 8	Elementary	1+ year	1+ year	Canada
Teacher 9	Arts	3+ years	5+ years	United States
Teacher 10	Elementary	5+ years	10+ years	Canada

Table 3 shows which CPT each participant is associated with, which provides context to the learning community process. Each teacher also reported the number of years at the research site, as well as international teaching experience, which speaks to their familiarity with a multicultural organization. As a means to gauge teachers' educational practice and ideologies, participants noted the country where they earned their education credentials.

Participant Descriptions

Teacher 1 is of French nationality and reportedly aligns extremely close to French culture, using the description of “pure French” during the demographic questionnaire phase of the study. Teacher 1 has over 40 years’ experience in education. Teacher 1 received her education credentials in France and has over 30 years’ experience in international education, with more than 20 years at the research site. Teacher 1 is a member of the language CPT at the research site.

Teacher 2 is also French and claims to align extremely close with the culture, particularly French customs and values. Teacher 2 obtained her education credentials in France and has over 20 years’ experience in front of the classroom. Teacher 2 has also served nearly 20 years in an international context and more than five years at the research site. Teacher 2 is also a member of the language CPT at the research site.

Teacher 3 hails from the United States and reports to moderately align with American culture. Teacher 3 received educational credentials from a university in the United States and has nearly 10 years of teaching experience. Of those, more than 5 years has been spent in an international setting, four of which are at the research site. Teacher 3 serves on the elementary CPT.

Teacher 4 is Polish and admits to closely align with Polish values, and “what it means to be Polish.” Teacher 4 has taught at the research site for over 15 years and also one year teaching abroad. Teacher 4 earned educational credentials in Poland and serves on the language CPT at ISE.

Teacher 5 is from Poland, but claims not to align closely with Polish culture, stating, “I have always felt like a global citizen.” Teacher 5 studied education at a Polish university and has

since logged over 10 years teaching experience, four of which in the international setting of the research site.

Teacher 6 identifies as “100% American.” Teacher 6 has over 20 years of experience in education, including one year at ISE. In spite of only one year abroad, Teacher 6 has worked for years in the United States with people from other cultures, including two summers abroad. Teacher 6 attended a US university and attends the elementary CPT at the school.

Teacher 7 is Polish and reports to averagely align with Polish culture. Teacher 7 has over 10 years’ experience in education and more than five at the research site. This teacher has adapted to teaching an international curriculum and values the international school setting. Teacher 7 earned their education credentials from a Polish university and serves on the Math and Science CPT.

Teacher 8 is Canadian and reports to moderately align with Canadian values. Teacher 8 obtained her teaching credentials from Canada and has over 25 years’ experience in education, most of which was spent in Canadian schools. Teacher 8 has minimal international experience, with one year teaching abroad and two summers working in another country. Teacher 8 noted a “desire to travel and learn” as the reason for moving abroad. This teacher serves on the elementary CPT at the school.

Teacher 9 is American and claims to align very closely to American culture. Teacher 9 received his education at an American university and has 20 years’ experience in front of the classroom. This teacher has over five years of international experience, serving in multiple foreign countries. Teacher 9 attends the Arts CPT at the research site.

Teacher 10 is Canadian and reports to moderately align with Canadian values. Teacher 10 moved abroad after receiving his education credentials from Canada and has over 10 years’

experience teaching in the international circuit. This teacher has lived in multiple countries and has been at the research site for over five years. Teacher 10 is a member of the elementary CPT at the research site.

Methodology and Data Analysis

A good case study design presents an in-depth understanding through multiple data collection methods (Creswell, 2013). A demographic questionnaire was used to categorize participants according to nationality, gain insight into perceived cultural alignment, identify teaching experience, and associate teachers with CPTs. The data gleaned from one-on-one interviews served as the primary data collected, which provided insight into participants' perception of CPTs at the research site. Direct observations were used to provide a greater understanding of the case and offer insight research participants' behaviors during CPT meetings.

Demographic Questionnaire

After signing participation consent forms, each participant completed a demographic questionnaire prior to a one-on-one interview. Participants were asked to provide their name and age, nationality, self-perceived alignment to nationality, teaching experience, international experience, CPT affiliation, and country where education credentials were obtained. The data collected from the demographic questionnaire was used to provide context for the study and categorize participants into appropriate cultural dimensions defined by Hofstede's (2001) theory.

One-on-One Interviews

The primary method of data collection was one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Each research participant completed an interview, resulting in a total of ten interviews. The interviews were conducted in December 2019 and January 2020. Interviews took place in a setting chosen

by each participant or in a vacant classroom. Each interview was recorded using a secured iPhone and backed up with a password-protected MacBook. Interviews lasted between 30 and 50 minutes, which allowed participants to fully describe their perceived reality and elaborate or clarify responses. Questions asked during each interview were thematically linked to Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory and DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of effective PLCs. Interview questions focused on leadership, collaboration, communication, and the change process. For each interview, the researcher took notes and created memos as interviews were conducted.

Upon the completion of each interview, the resulting .mp4 file was uploaded to Rev.com for transcription. The researcher reviewed each transcript and, using the audio recordings, made any necessary corrections. For member checking procedures, research participants were given a hardcopy of their transcript to proofread and check for accuracy. Once participant transcripts were approved, signed, and returned, the documents were uploaded to Dedoose.com to begin the coding process.

Direct Observation

Direct observations served as a secondary means of data collection and intended to provide a better understanding of the case (Stake, 2010). A total of five observations were completed, one from the language CPT, one from the Arts CPT, one from the Math and Science CPT, and two from the elementary CPT. Observations focused solely on research participants and their behaviors during the CPT meeting. During each observation, notes were recorded manually, as were possible meanings and reflections on participant behaviors and tendencies. Observation notes intended to provide a better understanding of cultural tendencies exhibited by research participants.

Researcher's Cultural Values

Interpretation is a critical component of qualitative data analysis. The subjective nature of interpretation creates a quandary in the way researchers analyze, understand, and explain the data. Hofstede (2001) acknowledged this dilemma in cross-cultural research suggesting,

The values of the researcher determine to a large extent the way he or she observes, describes, classifies, understands, and predicts reality. There is no way out of this dilemma but to (1) expose oneself and one's work to the work of others with different value systems and (2) try to be explicit as possible about one's own value system. (p. 15)

In an effort to be "as explicit as possible" about the researcher's own cultural values and provide insight into possible influences of those cultural values during the data analysis phase, an external cultural analysis tool was completed. In order to be transparent about and decrease possible researcher bias, a summary of the final report is included.

Hofstede's Cultural Compass© is a cultural analysis questionnaire consisting of 42 questions used to identify personal preferences and value systems based on Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions model. The Cultural Compass© intends to determine reasons behind behavior one is likely to encounter, understand the impact of one's own cultural values, and predict possible obstacles when working in a culturally diverse environment (Hofstede, 2001). Upon completion of the questionnaire, an individualized report is generated that offers insight into one's home country and allows for comparison to three other countries.

The researcher selected the United States as the researcher's home culture. Given the nationality of research participants, countries selected for comparison were Canada (Appendix D), France (Appendix E), and Poland (Appendix F). Once the countries were selected, the questionnaire was completed, and the report was analyzed. The individualized report includes a

comparative analysis of the United States and each selected country in regard to Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions model. The report also includes personal feedback for each cultural dimension based on the researcher's questionnaire responses.

Reflection on Culture Compass© Results

Interviews and observations are fundamental components of case study data collection (Yin, 2018). Though every effort was made to decrease researcher bias, the inherent subjectivity of data interpretation must be acknowledged. The raw data of interviews and observations are essential in understanding a phenomenon or issue and by extension, how the data is analyzed and by whom, is critical in understanding the complete picture presented (Hofstede, 2001; Stake 2010). The data provided from the Culture Compass© report offered insight into the researcher's background and how cultural influences might play a part in data analysis.

The Culture Compass© report included country comparisons and the researcher's personal preferences for each of Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions. The results of the Culture Compass© questionnaire provided insight into possible cultural influences of the researcher's perception related to data analysis. In addition, the report offered a perspective on research participants and their responses to the interview questions, as well as their behavior during observations.

The researcher is an American, but has lived outside of the United States over ten years. Abramson and Moran (2018) suggested through cross-cultural experiences, one becomes more open-minded and tolerant of cultural uniqueness, gains new insight, and develops an awareness of the impact of one's native culture. In the researcher's experience, adapting to a foreign culture does not necessarily diminish the foundational cultural values and tendencies of one's home culture. Instead, these foundational cultural elements can become more apparent in a foreign

culture. In one's home country tendencies and behaviors appear normal, as everyone is playing the part. Taking cultural tendencies out of context magnifies the cultural differences and makes them easier to recognize.

The data provided in the report suggested possible cultural influences in two main areas: (1) communication and (2) behaviors. The researcher's perception of communication might be influenced by cultural values. Considering the indulgent culture of Americans and the high value placed on freedom of speech, the concept and necessity of feedback and opinions could be different than other cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). This implies that the concept of constructive criticism when providing feedback could also influence the data analysis phase, as some research participants might view this as simply criticism (Abramson & Moran, 2018). Moreover, as American culture is prone to communicating openly and often, research participants from France (Appendix E) and Poland (Appendix F) might have a different perception of communication, how open one should be when communicating, or if non-verbal communication constitutes effective collaboration (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede, 2010). Also, research participants from Canada (Appendix D) might be more comfortable sharing feedback or opinions in a one-on-one setting, rather than in a group.

The report also suggests possible cultural influences in understanding behaviors (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). The United States scores significantly lower than Canada (Appendix D), France (Appendix E), and Poland (Appendix F) in uncertainty avoidance index, meaning Americans are more comfortable with ambiguity and behavior is influenced by perceived contexts (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010). As an American, the researcher's idea of appropriate or effective behavior in the context of CPTs might differ from that of

research participants. This difference might influence data collected during the observation phase or the analysis of observational notes.

Coding and Data Analysis

The coding process included two methods of coding and utilized Braun and Clark's (2012) thematic analysis. Deductive and inductive codes were developed as a means to address the study's research questions. The researcher began the coding cycle with a set of a priori codes related to DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of effective PLCs. Saldaña (2016) recommends this method as a means to promote harmony between codes and the study's conceptual or theoretical framework. Saldaña (2016) adds that this process can "enable an analysis that directly answers your research question" (p. 71). Examples of the studies a priori codes included *perception of shared leadership*, *a focus on collaboration*, *shared mission and goals*, and *continuous improvement*.

Once the transcripts were reviewed with a priori codes, the researcher used holistic coding as a preliminary step to grasp basic themes in the interview data (Saldaña, 2016). The holistic coding cycle is applicable when the researcher has a general idea of what to investigate and allows the researcher to "chunk the text into broad topics as a preliminary step before more detailed analysis" (p. 166). The holistic coding process also allowed more codes to emerge from the collected data, which were added to the a priori set.

The researcher then analyzed each line in the interview transcripts using a values coding approach. Saldaña (2016) describes values coding as "the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldviews" (p. 131). The value coding cycle followed Saldaña's (2016) definition of each term:

Value is the importance attributed to something, someone, and situational norms, while

an attitude is way one thinks about something, someone, or concept, and a belief is “part of a system that includes values and attitudes, plus personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretative perceptions of the social world.” (p. 132)

All three constructs are formed, perpetuated, and changed through social interactions and cultural membership (Saldaña, 2016). Emergent codes from this cycle added to the set of codes and helped guide the focus toward the research questions.

Development of Themes

Thematic Analysis was used in order to find patterns among the codes and interview memos. Braun and Clark (2012) define thematic analysis as “a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set” (p. 57). Braun and Clark (2012) outlined a six-phase approach to thematic analysis:

- Phase 1: Familiarizing Yourself with the Data
- Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes
- Phase 3: Searching for Themes
- Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes
- Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes
- Phase 6: Producing the Report

Focusing on meaning across the data sets allowed the researcher to see and make sense of collective meanings and experiences (Braun & Clark, 2012). The collective meanings produced emergent themes that supported the construction of thematic categories. Though multiple patterns could be identified across data sets, the intent of analysis is to determine those relevant

to answering a particular research question (Braun & Clark, 2012). Considering the focus of this research, the collected data was analyzed and explored through:

1. Cultural values and tendencies that relate to a particular Hofstede (2001) dimension.
2. The influence of national culture and cultural values on DuFour and Eaker's (1998) six characteristics of effective PLCs.

The holistic coding cycle, which focused on Dufour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of effective PLCs, produced eight initial thematic categories:

- The Change Process
- CPT Leadership Structure
- Lack of Time
- Feedback and Opinions
- Collaborative Efforts
- Supportive Conditions
- Working Towards Improvement
- Communication

The values coding cycle, which centered on Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions added five thematic categories to the initial list:

- Values Modern Teaching Methods
- Values Freedom of Speech
- Attitudes Toward Hierarchy
- Attitudes Toward CPTs
- Belief of Effective Member Characteristic

Braun and Clark (2012) define the fourth phase of thematic analysis as reviewing potential themes. Further analysis and revision of developed codes and the initial themes allowed for categories to be combined, ultimately producing four primary themes and four subthemes:

Table 4

Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: CPTs with No Direction and an Unclear Mission	Subtheme: A Lack of Buy-In for CPTs
Theme 2: Teachers are Inundated with Change Initiatives	Subtheme: Emotions toward change – Frustration, Anxiety, and Apathy
Theme 3: Inconsistent and Unclear Leadership in CPTs	Subtheme: Cultural Values of Leadership Characteristics
Theme 4: An Understanding and Desire to Collaborate	Subtheme: Communication and the Need for Trust in CPTs

Presentation of Findings and Themes

Interviews were used as the primary data source for the research. All ten participants completed the interviews: three teachers from the language department, five from elementary, one from the math and science department, and one from the arts department. Each interview took place in a participant selected setting and lasted 30-50 minutes. Research participants offered key insight into their perception of the school's CPT structure, as well as leadership, the change process, effective teacher characteristics, and communication. An analysis of each interview through two levels of coding produced four major themes and four sub-themes.

The data revealed a number of concerns regarding CPTs, each of which influence each other. From the collected data, the researcher concluded that many CPTs function with no clear mission and direction. As a result, there is a lack of buy-in for CPTs at the research site. The data also showed that there is an immense amount of change initiatives introduced in CPTs, which elicit a number of negative emotions, such as frustration, anxiety, and apathy. Closely related, another finding suggests an inconsistent or unclear leadership structure throughout CPTs, which can directly influence their functionality. At the heart of any professional learning community is collaboration. The data revealed that many teachers understand collaboration and most exhibit a desire for collaborative opportunities. In relation, the research also showed trust as a vital component of effective CPTs, specifically to promote supportive conditions and the sharing of best practices, both of which are influenced by feedback and opinions.

Theme 1: CPTs with No Direction and Unclear Mission

DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggested that PLCs function best and often thrive when there is a collective commitment to shared mission and goals. While CPTs are intended to bring teachers together for collaborative opportunities, multiple teachers reported being unaware of their CPT goal or the mission is unclear. When asked about their CPT mission, Teacher 1 responded, “The mission, we mentioned that a few times but we don't really work on that in teams, I would say.” Teacher 3 explained,

To be quite honest, I'm uncertain of our mission and goals for this year. We don't have a clear direction. Every week is something different. We're not working on an overarching [goal]; we're not working on something long-term. Most of it's disjointed. We have the recurring theme of [Understanding by Design] UbD because that's like an overarching thing for the whole school and inquiry-based learning came back around...If there is a

long-term goal, I don't know it. And I would think if anybody...was to know it, I think I would be aware of it.

Teacher 5 addressed the lack of identifiable long-term goals,

I cannot think of a long term. It's not stressed that it's for long term. Maybe this is the problem that they don't remind you that it makes sense, that you just feel that you do some silly things, silly tasks, you're focused on, things that get you angry because you're frustrated with them instead of focusing on, 'Oh yeah, There was some long term' [goal]...Maybe this is the problem.

Teacher 6 acknowledged their personal mission and stated, "I think my mission is to be part of the team, to voice my opinions, things that are going well, concerns, to collaborate with the rest of the elementary team, just kind of to share and work together." However, when asked about the mission of CPT, Teacher 6 added, "I'm not sure if the group, you know, came up with kind of a long-range plan at the end of last year for this year." Teacher 7 explicitly stated "...to be honest, I don't know the mission." Teacher 8 focused on the general goal of CPTs, but acknowledged the lack of direction suggested from other participants,

It's mostly to do with curriculum, is what I've figured out. And also some of the assessments, I get the sense that the CPT is designed to help get everybody on the same page with assessments, and there's some school-wide initiatives that admin is trying to put into place. And it doesn't seem to have any purpose really, to do this task, other than the fact that it's required by accreditation I think. And so some of our CPT time, our faculty meeting I guess on Wednesdays, once a month we're doing this, putting information from the guidebook into the [Atlas] Rubicon and we're basically just copying it and putting it on, and I'm not sure why we have to do that. Then there's the staff that

participate in it, and it's not always clear to the staff I think, what we're supposed to be doing and how it affects the bigger picture.

Teacher 10 also noted the lack of clear goals,

I don't know that we have necessarily clear mission and goals. It seems that we just go week by week and then somebody shows up and tells us what is probably going to happen and then we go through with it. But I don't remember us ever having any mission and goals, especially to last year when our mission was supposed to be to revamp our science curriculum and we talked about science maybe three times.

Subtheme 1: A lack of buy-in for CPTs. A notable concern that could have a far-reaching impact is a lack of buy-in for the CPT process. As a result of directionless CPTs, multiple participants discounted the need for CPTs altogether. The research site implemented CPTs three years ago as a means to align curriculum and promote a collaborative culture. Though the CPTs at the research site intend to provide time for teacher collaboration, multiple teachers undervalue them because their purpose is unclear or the initiatives introduced in CPTs are seemingly disjointed. Teacher 9 stated, "Oh, if we're talking about the CPTs that I'm in right now, I have a hard time finding the value." Another teacher explained,

But I must say that I would live really well without all the CPTs. I say we have too much. When we have the full day of CPTs, like when we have in-service day, it's too much. I think it's good from time to time. I would say one hour per week. Okay, fine. But to have the whole afternoon or the whole day or when we have the meeting Wednesday afternoon and then again the CPT on Thursday, I think it's a bit too much...We spend too much time now, I think, especially this year we spent too much time on those meetings, CPTs instead of trying to prepare our classes.

The CPTs at the research site were a notable shift in curriculum planning and collaboration. However, due to an unclear vision and unstructured guidelines, some participants undervalue CPTs as a whole, as another teacher from a different CPT noted,

I haven't actually figured out really the purpose for the CPT in a clear way, like, I'm still a little confused on how... I see there's faculty meetings, CPT is kind of overlapped a bit, and I'm not sure the difference between the two things and I'm not sure if there is even a difference. But I just know that there's 45 minutes on Monday at lunch, which nobody really wants to spend their time there, and then there's an hour and a half on Wednesday after school when everybody's tired and nobody wants to be there either. It's sort of like, "Let's try and find some things to do for each of these every week," and sometimes it's... There's not a natural flow. It's like, Okay, today we're talking about this... Why?

As CPTs are a necessary component to curriculum alignment at ISE, the participant responses, which focus on the overall functionality of CPTs, suggest that CPTs are undervalued. The responses by each teacher illustrate the lack of buy-in with CPTs as a whole. The lack of structure in CPTs also suggests that there is a lack of clarity in the function of CPTs or there is no effective model subscribed to by the research site.

Theme 2: Teachers are Inundated with Change Initiatives

The second theme identified in the interview data is associated with change and speaks directly to DuFour and Eaker's (1998) action orientation and experimentation component of PLCs. The CPTs at the research site were initially introduced to align curriculum. However, since the inception of CPTs at ISE, many changes were introduced, most of which focused on teaching practices, learning theories, and curriculum development. Every research participant

noted the amount of change initiatives introduced in CPTs, as well as the shift to CPTs themselves. Participants also noted the lack of time to document and implement proposed changes.

Teacher 2 acknowledged the overwhelming amount of changes that are introduced since the induction of CPTs, “I saw so many differences, so many changes that we have been asked, and after it change, and after it change again.” Teacher 3 noted the disjointed nature of their CPT,

Every week is something different...I feel like I’m wasting my time. So I don't know about comfort level, but I would prefer to be in the know and would prefer not to waste my time with things that don't lead to something.

Time is always a factor with implementing change. Providing teachers with an appropriate amount of time to implement new initiatives while still offering enough planning time to develop curriculum units and daily lesson plans is a delicate balance. However, the lack of direction and disjointed structure noted by research participants in CPTs suggests that meetings are ineffective.

Teacher 4 responded,

Like so when we’re doing things for Atlas [curriculum management system], I’m like I don’t understand why we’re, you know...using this. I understand like in theory why they’re doing it, but it just seems like a lot of time for something that isn’t really used regularly. Like I don’t think most teachers are referring to that in planning their lessons.

Teacher 5 added,

And we have not enough time to get used to something...So many changes and so many important things that we should do...We have transfer goals, we have executive functions, we have [Understanding by Design] UBD, you have [Inquiry based Learning]

IBL. So, you know, there are always changes and always we have something new. So, um, I have heard so many opinions that we are tired, I may agree with that.

Teacher 9 focused on the exhaustive nature of multiple changes,

I think I can stand for everyone and say whenever we have new hoops to jump through, we are exhausted before we've begun. We don't have any time for it and we would rather not have one more hoop to jump through...There are so many things that are on our plate. There's no room for new things.

CPTs often serve as a means to present new ideas and change initiatives suggested by school administration. However, due to the number of changes and limited collaborative time, teachers struggle with accepting new changes. Teacher 10 suggested,

I don't really think that we even have had the opportunity to discuss that, so it's hard to say because it's so regimented now that we have a very strict schedule and we're doing this and then we're doing this and then we're doing this and the answer comes from, I don't know where.

Subtheme 1: Cultural response to change – frustration, anxiety, and apathy. The process of change tends to elicit an array of emotions. Culturally speaking, the data showed that research participants approach the change process in different ways, but share common emotions throughout the process. French teachers felt anxious about learning new things. However, the anxiety experienced was related to doing a new task well, rather than the change itself. American and Canadian teachers typically experienced frustration, especially when the change is perceived to be unnecessary or irrelevant. Polish teachers also felt frustration in regard to change without purpose. Teacher 1, who is French, explained the emotions experienced in the change process,

I don't like changes because when you have a change, that means that you go to something which is not known and it's scary most of the time. Or it's confusing because we don't know that yet. We have to learn it again to learn something new.

Teacher 2, also French, added,

The feeling that I have is the curiosity, it is the first thing, and after I think I'm very anxious. The second thing will be the stress and the anxiety...I think that sometimes this anxiety is not stress, it's just anxiety to do well.

Teacher 3, an American, acknowledged emotions associated with needless or endless change initiative,

Sometimes I do get a little bit anxious about these changes because they're not always mapped out in a way that you know what's going to come. And then sometimes I do get frustrated because it might be a change, but then we're going to change it again next year.

Teacher 6, also American, focused on the relevancy of change, "My answer depends on the change, I would be [okay] if you are talking about the emotion, if it's good change, I'm happy but if not, I'm, I'm frustrated." Teacher 7, who is Polish, also responded that change initiatives should be relevant and purposeful,

If you agree with the change, it's easier, all the ways to do it, and you have more positive [emotions] in that, whatever positive feelings they are. When you are against some change, so sorry, you will always have negative feelings.

Similarly, Teachers 8 and 10, both Canadian, expressed frustration toward change, unless it is deemed relevant to their classes or practice. Teacher 8 explained,

Sometimes I'm happy about change, and I enjoy the new results that it's going to bring. Other times, if it's change just for the sake of change, I find it frustrating, and if it's a

change to make things worse then it bothers me. So I'm not opposed to change, but I like to see that it's going to improve things, make things better.

Teacher 10 elaborated on this idea,

It depends on what kind of change it is. I think that there's going to be a good change, then it's exciting, something that's interesting and a new challenge. But if the changes like this one for example, that might contradict what we're supposed to be trying to achieve, then I wouldn't be very happy about it... Well, we're obviously frustrated, but I've been doing this for a couple of years now in the same sort of format. So most of the time it's not just frustration, it's apathy, there's nothing that's going to be done about it.

The data suggests that many teachers experience negative emotions toward change. The data indicates that multiple teachers face unnecessary stress due to the number of change initiatives in CPTs. The negative emotions experienced could also influence teachers' perceived value of CPTs.

Theme 3: Inconsistent and Unclear Leadership in CPTs

The concept of leadership in PLCs can take on different meanings. Morrissey (2000) suggested the traditional leadership concept has been replaced by a shared leadership structure, where administrators, along with teachers, participate in collective dialogue, share responsibilities, and work together to toward a shared goal. DuFour and Eaker (1998) support the idea of shared leadership in PLCs suggesting leaders involve members in decision-making processes and empower teachers to act. In essence, a shared leadership structure promotes shared responsibility and alters the role of leader to facilitator.

The position of CPT leader carries some level of autonomy and the leadership role varies among different CPTs, as some leaders offer directives for curriculum alignment while others focus on creating collaborative opportunities. However, in each CPT, the leader often acts as a two-way channel by which information is passed between school administration and teachers. In this sense, CPT leaders serve as facilitators, rather than a traditional leader. Though CPT members recognize the need for a facilitator, many participants suggest a perceived hierarchy in their groups. However, the perceived hierarchy works for some CPTs, while it fails in others.

When asked about the need for a traditional CPT leader, Teacher 1 responded, “I say we wouldn’t know what to do. If there’s nobody in charge saying, we need to do this and this, then nothing’s really going to get done.” Teacher 2 expanded on this idea,

Of course, I think it’s something that it’s crucial. Something that has to be because we are working collaboratively, but we should have... My group, the group should know what they have to do, so there should be somebody who tells them what the administration want us to do...So I think that this pyramidal system should exist.

Teacher 5 recognized a hierarchy, but notes the value of a shared leadership structure and discounts the idea of someone in charge,

I understand that this is some kind of necessity. I don’t really like it. I’m not a fan of hierarchy. I can agree that I have a leader, and it’s okay, but I think that we would do without the leader as well. I don’t think that a leader during the CPT meetings is a necessity. I don’t feel this way. I believe that everyone is equally valuable, and their input can be equally important in discussion, in school life, wherever and every walk of life. I believe that people are able to organize themselves without being controlled by someone.

Teacher 6 suggested that the leadership structure is unclear, but the role is necessary, “I think it is important to have somebody in charge. I feel like sometimes I’m not sure who’s in charge. Kinda goes between, I guess, two people.” Teacher 8 recognized a need for a leadership position, but also noted a lack of clarity and a feeling of discomfort with hierarchy,

I think it’s a little hard, because there’s a lot of cooks in the kitchen, so to speak. There’s the elementary leader, and then there’s admin, and there’s the director, and so all three levels have different expectations for this CPT...I think there has to be somebody in charge, but I feel like some of the CPT members are willing to discuss and come up with a solution together. I’m not really comfortable with it, because I’ve come from a place with a very collaborative model.

Teacher 9 also recognized the need for a facilitator, but discounts the idea of shared leadership,

I think it functions well when there is one director who gives exact specifics and targets when you know that you’ve hit them. I find that shared direction or taking turns or everybody feels like saying whatever emotion pops into their head simply wastes time.

Teacher 10 discussed possible ramifications of hierarchical leadership, suggesting,

...the CPT leader feels that they’re in a position of authority when they’re really not in a position of authority...the facilitator is more their role rather than somebody that’s telling us what to do. And I think that a lot of people, especially teachers, when they are faced with a position of authority, they feel that they need to answer to that authority and if any resistance on their part is provided, then something that might be an issue in terms of their standing at their job. I don’t think that there really should be a hierarchy. I think that everybody should be on the same plane and that the CPT leader

isn't the person that's in charge of the situation. The CPT leader is simply the person that's organizing our time.

Subtheme 1: Cultural values of leadership characteristics. Participants' responses suggest that the current leadership structure in CPTs is unclear and inconsistent. Multiple teachers noted the need for a hierarchy in CPTs, while others acknowledged a type of shared leadership is necessary. Despite the differences, teachers shared similar ideas of effective leadership characteristics, many of which noted the need for an open-minded and collaborative facilitator.

When asked about characteristics that leaders should possess, teacher 1 stated, "To be able to run...a meeting, to be able to direct us to the goal, and to guide us to do a proper study of our goal and of what we have to do." Teacher 2 added, "I think the first thing will be the sense of listening because our listening can be understanding." Teacher 6 expanded this idea,

I think probably the most important characteristics for leadership would be someone who's a good listener, who is able to, um, kind of assess everybody's roles and find different people's strengths, and then capture that, 'cause everybody's bringing different things to the table. Sometimes people are like, you know, less talkative but they're listening and, you know, making sure everybody has like equal, you know, say and their opinions are all valued.

Multiple teachers placed value on a well-informed and open-minded leader. Teacher 3 noted the importance of an educated leader, "Well-educated, knows what they're talking about. Is in the position for the correct reason. Wants to be here and I think the biggest would be collaborative, open, and nonjudgmental." Each identified characteristic is indicative of a multidimensional leader who exhibits empathy and possesses an understanding of the concepts discussed in CPTs.

Teacher 7 also noted a need for a knowledgeable leader, “I have the feeling that the majority of people, um, need or want to hear that the CPT leader knows everything about [Understanding by Design] UBD, [Inquiry Based Learning] IBL and is an expert.” The idea of a leader as an expert implies that CPT leaders should model the idea of continuous improvement and receive additional professional development in regard to the concepts and changes presented in each CPT.

Teacher 5 offered a compelling response connecting leadership with the concept of collaboration,

I think that what I value is partnership. That a leader is not to lead. It's not to impose things, it's not to control something, but it's to be more of an organizer and a partner and achieving some common goal. As long as the members of the CPT feel that we are partners, that we are here to do something together, and this person is just an organizer who helps us to, let's say, have things more efficient or more organized. I think this is just about, as I said, just as with teacher, I feel that this is the role of the teacher. That you facilitate things, but you don't tell people exactly what to do. You just lead them...

Other teachers acknowledged trust and dependability as a key characteristic. Teacher 4 offered the idea that a leader is someone who is “dedicated” and “we can trust them” and “if there is a problem, they will fight for us.” Teacher 8 noted the need for organization, “Being organized, having a clear vision, a focus for this particular meeting and also how it fits for the bigger picture.” Teacher 9 also acknowledged organization stating, “Being concise and ready. Knowing exactly what the goal is, accomplishing the goal and moving forward.” Teacher 10 also recognized this idea, noting, “A CPT leader should be somebody who is organized, who is

keeping us on track but is also ensuring that there's collaboration and that everybody is participating.”

Theme 4: An Understanding and Desire to Collaborate

At the heart of any successful professional learning community is the concept of collaboration (Brunton, 2016). The collaborative teams enabled in the context of a PLC provide teachers an opportunity to share best practices and provokes continued improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Throughout the interview process, multiple participants acknowledged the importance of collaboration while elaborating on their understanding of the term. Teacher 1, defined collaboration as,

Group work of course, it's teamwork...I think it's a good thing because we can exchange ideas, especially with this new [Inquiry Based Learning] IBL program. Sometimes we are lost. We were lost at the beginning of the school year. Many teachers were lost, confused and we try to help each other. Do you have any idea? What can I do? So that's a good thing.

Despite a positive view of collaboration, Teacher 1 noted, “I prefer to work alone.” When asked to elaborate, the teacher explained,

Don't forget, that's also the difference of French education and international education. In international education, we do a lot of projects. We teach children to think, problem solving and so on and so on. In France, it's more like in Poland you learn by heart, so you are the only one who can do that. You don't need any help from others to learn by heart. You have to memorize by heart. In the international school it's more working in teams, discovering the why and what and so it's very different, very different approach.

Teacher 2 focused on the necessary collaborative component of listening,

Collaboration for me it's to listen to everybody, to let everybody speak what is her or his feeling about what has been suggested, and after to come to a consensus, and after that to walk together to achieve that...Together we decide what will be our goals. So basically it's to have a goal in common and to walk together to achieve it.

Teacher 3 described the collaborative process as "An open discussion, judgment free, and people working towards a common goal." However, teacher 3 acknowledged a disconnect between the CPT goal and collaboration, "...a lot of the time our collaboration doesn't help a common goal."

In spite of the disconnect, the participant went on to explain the importance of collaboration,

Because everyone's better together. Two heads are always better than one and I think especially in this profession and here at this school there's a lot of things that would be nice to get someone else's input on or help. Or just to like bounce ideas off of...I don't have a teammate, there are multiple classes of other grades so people can plan together and, you know, talk through problems...it's helpful to be able to bring things to the bigger audience to ask questions. So I don't feel like I'm in it on this on my own.

Teacher 4 explained that collaboration is "sharing thoughts, answering questions, double checking what the discussion is about...helping each other in many ways" and went on to state, "it's very important for me." Teacher 5 focused on essential characteristics of collaborative members,

I believe that collaboration is not about equal input, because I don't believe that everyone has to give equally in discussion or whatever we do, but that you are actively engaged in whatever you're doing, and you try your best to improve whatever we're working on. Because from the social perspective, we're not islands,

right? I think that on every level of our lives without collaboration, it's just not natural. I think that collaboration is something that should be or is engraved in us and should be somehow fostered for our own good to make us better people and to work.

Teacher 6 also noted the importance of sharing best practices and learning from colleagues, "For me collaboration is people sharing ideas and bouncing ideas off of one another." Teacher 6 then explained, "I think it's important to collaborate with the team. Because everybody has different experiences and, um, different areas of strength, and I think as professional teachers you learn a lot from other teachers." Teacher 7, who prefers to work with others, recognized the relationship between collaboration, trust, and sharing,

It's the atmosphere that you create that no one is better. And so everyone at least should be willing to participate and share thinking, ideas, lesson plans, whatever. Um, for me also it's not that we have expert in one person who's expert in every single area of knowledge that we talk and we discuss. It's normal that someone knows more on a topic, but this is the time of sharing. Um, yeah, I, I take something from some people and I also think they should take something from me, from my knowledge and from my experience.

Teacher 8, who prefers to choose collaborative partners, defined collaboration as "working with other people for a common goal," an essential characteristic for successful CPTs. Teacher 9 stated, "Listening first. Sharing your own ideas. Relating the two together. Asking questions about how to move forward and when you reach a consensus, moving forward with eyes on how you're progressing and how close to your goals you're getting." The response from teacher 10 incorporated similar ideas,

I would define collaboration as sharing ideas together in a comfortable and safe environment where you're not afraid to express your opinion and you're not afraid

to, I would say, make a mistake in terms of what you've said or what other people might view as something that isn't necessarily going to work towards a goal.

Though each response was different in defining what collaboration is, each participant noted similar ideas. The terms used fall under the same lexical field of “togetherness” and share fundamental elements of collaboration. The data shows that teachers understand the idea of collaboration and value the act of collaborating with colleagues. But, without a clear mission or goal, teachers are uncertain as to what they should collaborate on.

Subtheme 1: Communication and the need for trust in CPTs. In order for collaboration to be effective, CPT leaders and members must create an atmosphere of trust. A subtheme that emerged from the data relates to DuFour and Eaker’s (1998) collaborative teams and the sense of a supportive community. In an effective learning community, communication is essential and provides a foundation for which to build the collaborative structure necessary. In this sense, the role of feedback and opinions should not be understated.

The data showed that each CPT works within their own atmosphere and some are more supportive than others. Multiple participants valued feedback and an open forum to express opinions respectfully, however some work in an environment that is not conducive for sharing one’s thoughts. Teacher 3 described the atmosphere of their CPT as,

Everybody keeps quiet and minds their own business, keeps their head down.

Thankfully, we have our CPT during lunch, so people use that as an excuse and are just like, you’ll see. They bring a very large lunch that day and will just eat and use it as a time to be distracted so that they don’t need to participate and cross their fingers that they don’t get called on. If I have an opinion about something I will present it to a colleague or my principal at a later date. But my opinion is never shared during CPT.

And when it is asked for and when I'm called upon, I will share something that is as nonspecific to my classroom and as non like controversial, just blanket. Great. Okay.

Yes, no.

Teacher 5, from the same CPT, noted discomfort in sharing feedback and her opinion, "Yeah, I am but in general, the atmosphere is as if ... it's not comfortable. I can do it. I'm okay with that, but it's not comfortable." Teacher 8 expanded on this explaining,

I think everybody should participate, and I think that there should be an atmosphere that everybody feels safe to participate and say what they're feeling and what's on their mind. But personally, I don't feel that yet, [I don't feel] that it's okay for me to say how I feel about things.

Teacher 10 identified a lack of action as a source of restrained communication, "I only would take the time to share my opinion when I've become very frustrated. Otherwise, I don't think that anything is going to be done about it, so there's no sense."

Conversely, teachers in other CPTs are more comfortable with exchanging ideas and sharing feedback. When asked about providing feedback and opinions, Teacher 1 explained, No problem. I always say what I think. No problem with that...even if we criticize, it's good. Sometimes we look at a [curriculum] map and we criticize each other. Is it really an essential question? Is it really related to transfer goals? No, I think there is no negative characteristic because even if we criticize or if we don't agree, other people accept it.

In spite of this, Teacher 1 also acknowledged there are times when restraint is valuable, "But sometimes, I would say sometimes I don't even take a chance to do it because if I know that it's

not going to be well accepted then I prefer to not to say it.” When asked about characteristics of supportive conditions, Teacher 2 responded,

Respect to what has been said that we have to do, and respect to what people that I’m telling that is saying, and also listening. Being assertive, I think that maybe being assertive, but maybe I’m assertive and I’m really curious to know what my group will say. Maybe I’m assertive and I don’t feel it because I’m saying what we have to do, explaining what has been said.

Other teachers placed value on honest feedback, as Teacher 4 noted, “I don’t see a reason to give feedback if it’s not honest.” However, honest feedback, or how it is understood, can create tensions within an intercultural group. Teacher 6 connected the concept of honesty with respect and collaboration, stating,

I think it’s important, if you disagree with something, to say, “I disagree with that,” and then voice, you know, your opinion, and that way people can, you know, voice ... that puts a seed in someone’s head of like oh, there might be a different way, or let’s talk about this at a different time or, you know, I think rather than someone getting upset with something, it’s always important to share and, you know, voice if you agree or disagree, or you have a different way you think something might be going.

In order for the collaborative processes in CPTs to flourish, an atmosphere of trust and respect must be established. The data shows that few CPTs at the research site are capable of achieving supportive conditions through open dialogue and trust among CPT members. The data also show a disconnect in other CPTs that can stifle the collaborative process and ultimately restrict the sharing of best practices, learning from colleagues, and building a collaborative organizational culture.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the influence of cultural within intercultural PLCs at an international school. Findings based on ten one-on-one interviews and five observations revealed that the current PLC structure, known as CPTs at the research site, are undervalued and perceived to be aimless in their mission. Participants indicated that the number of changes initiated in CPTs is overwhelming and the emotions elicited by the change initiatives vary. The data showed the emotions experienced by research participants differed depending on their nationality. The data implied a cultural element in the approach to and acceptance of a change process.

Participants also mentioned the leadership structure of CPTs, but the belief of what leadership should look like differed among teachers. While some participants noted an acceptance and expectation of hierarchy within their CPT, others suggested the need for shared leadership where all members share responsibility and leaders act as facilitators. The differences found in the role of leadership could be attributed to cultural factors. The data showed that participants understand the concept of collaboration and multiple teachers value the process. Participants also identified creating a supportive environment, where trust is a key component in CPTs. Communication is a vital aspect of collaboration, as is honest feedback and opinions. However, how feedback and opinions are communicated and received differ from culture to culture. The establishment of a supportive environment will need to consider the cultural aspect of communication and CPT members will need an understanding of cultural differences.

Though multiple themes and subthemes were identified from the data analysis, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The identified themes are connected and each can influence

the others. A detailed interpretation, with a focus on culture, of each theme and subtheme and their relationship to the literature review and theoretical framework will be presented in chapter 5. In addition, chapter 5 will also provide implications of the study, proposals for action, and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the influence of culture in intercultural professional learning communities (PLCs) at an international school. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study and a discussion on major findings as related to culture, intercultural PLCs, and international schools. Also included is a discussion on connections of this study and reviewed literature. Chapter 5 concludes with a discussion of the implications for action, study limitations, recommendations for future research, and final comments.

Summary of the Study

Previous research suggested that culture plays a significant role in developing and shaping one's perception, values, behaviors, and understanding through experiences, beliefs, and traditions (Abramson & Moran, 2018; Hall & Hord, 2011; Hofstede, 2001, Saint-Jacques, 2012). Hofstede (2001) defined culture as “mental programming” and a “collective phenomenon” that is deeply embedded in each individual and related to a set of collective norms, values, and traditions that differ from culture to culture. Abramson and Moran (2018) posited that culture is the driving force of human perception and behavior, which in turn influences motivation, understanding, and openness in a work environment. In the context of an international school, the impact of culture on perception, behavior, motivation, and understanding is magnified due to the multicultural makeup of the organization.

International schools typically reflect a culturally diverse teaching staff, each member with a cultural identity that influences their perception and understanding of educational practices, collaboration, and teamwork (Brunton, 2016; Williams, 2019). Like many educational institutions, international schools strive to develop a culture of collaboration that promotes

student learning and school improvement. In many schools, one such method to improve collaboration among teachers is professional learning communities. DuFour et al. (2016) explained the collaborative nature of a PLC represents a process by which teachers work together to improve student achievement and address organizational changes. Though there is no formal definition of a PLC, many share similar characteristics. DuFour and Eaker (1998) identified six characteristics that contribute to PLC effectiveness: (1) shared mission, vision, and values (2) collective inquiry (3) collaborative teams (4) action orientation and experimentation (5) continuous improvement and (6) results orientation. Each characteristic is built into the collaborative structure of the PLC and plays an essential role in the processes involved.

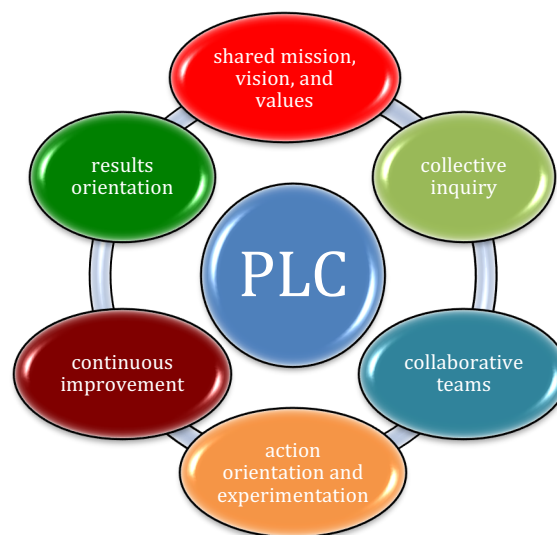


Figure 2. *DuFour and Eaker's (1998) Characteristics of PLCs*

Cross-cultural misunderstandings are an often-overlooked source of trouble and many international schools experience challenges with collaborative processes, such as PLCs, due to the cultural differences found among the staff (Hofstede et al. 2012; Schipper, 2014). Though the experience of working with multiple cultures is unique, an unawareness of cultural differences can be detrimental to the team, undermine collaborative processes, and impede PLC success. The

purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the influence of culture on intercultural PLCs in an international school.

Further, this study used Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory as the theoretical framework in order to illuminate the cultural differences in intercultural PLCs. Hofstede's (2001) six dimensions of culture informed the focus of each research question, data collection and analysis methods, and how the findings were reported (Creswell, 2015). Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory suggested that individuals from the same culture share collective cultural values related to problems within every society: identity, equality, gender, truth, virtues, and freedoms. From these basic societal problems, Hofstede (2001) developed six dimensions:

Table 5

Hofstede's (2001) Cultural Dimensions and Identifiers

Cultural Dimension	Identifier
Power Distance Index (PDI)	Expected inequality (high to low)
Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)	Dealing with the unknown (strong to weak)
Individualism/Collectivism (IND/COL)	Dependence on others
Masculinity to Femininity (MAS/FEM)	Emotional gender roles
Long/Short-term Orientation (LTO/STO)	Perspective on time and change
Indulgence to Restraint (ING/RES)	Dealing with natural desires

From: Hofstede (2001, 2015)

This study focused on one international school with a multicultural faculty in the European Union. At the time of research, the school practiced a version of PLCs known by teachers and administrators as collaborative planning teams (CPTs). The CPTs at the school intended to provide teachers collaborative opportunities for curriculum planning and alignment,

as well as shifting and implementing new learning theories and teaching practices. For the purpose of this study, the term PLC and CPT are used interchangeably.

This study had an emphasis on the cultural values and tendencies of international K-12 schoolteachers and intended to illuminate the influence these might have within the context of CPTs. The research design and data collection methods were guided by the following research questions:

1. What characteristics of professional learning communities, as defined by DuFour and Eaker (1998), are influenced by international teachers' cultural values identified in Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory?
2. What strategies can K-12 teachers employ to better facilitate the functionality and effectiveness of an international school PLC?

Review of Participants and Methodology

This study was conducted at an international school located in the European Union. The school employs approximately 60 teachers, 10 of which volunteered to take part in this study. Participants in this study represented four different cultures: (1) American (2) French (3) Polish and (4) Canadian. According to Hofstede's (2001) research, the countries represented in this study align with the following:

Table 6

Participants' Cultural Alignment

	PDI	UAI	IND/COL	MAS/FEM	LTO/STO	ING/RES
American	Low	Weak	IND	MAS	STO	ING
Canadian	Low	Weak	IND	MAS	STO	ING

Table 6

(Continued)

French	High	Strong	IND	FEM	LTO	RES
Polish	High	Strong	IND	MAS	STO	RES

From: Hofstede's Six Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al. 2010)

A demographic questionnaire was used to categorize participants into related cultural dimensions defined by Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory. The demographic questionnaire also collected participants' age, gender, perceived cultural alignment, teaching experience, international experience, and country where education credentials were obtained. The demographic questionnaire provided insight into participants' experience with other nationalities and a glimpse at teachers' self-perception.

One-on-one interviews were the primary data source for this case study. Interviews were conducted in a private and comfortable setting selected by each participant. Interview questions were designed to align with Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory and address DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of effective PLCs. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed for data analysis. The data analysis phase included two rounds of coding, which generated four primary themes and four subthemes.

Direct observations were utilized to develop a better understanding of the case and participants. Notes were recorded during each observation, as well as implications of behaviors and reflections on each CPT meeting. Observational data was used to support interview findings and corroborate responses with behaviors.

Key Findings

This study explored the influence of culture in intercultural PLCs at an international school. Data analyzed from a demographic questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and direct observations produced four primary themes and four subthemes. Themes and subthemes were related to shared mission and goals, collaboration, the change process, and leadership.

The data suggested that the culture of teachers did influence the foundational collaborative structure necessary for CPTs to be effective. Despite different cultural backgrounds, research participants shared a common understanding of collaboration and placed value on collaborative processes. However, communication within an intercultural group setting did serve as an obstacle for effective CPT implementation. Consequently, the data showed differing ideas about establishing trust within each CPT, which impacted participants' willingness to share opinions and provide feedback in learning communities.

The data also indicated that culture influences teachers' perception of change as well as the emotions experienced during the change process. Each participant recognized an overwhelming amount of change initiatives presented in CPTs. The emotions elicited from the change process varied among participants and differed depending on cultural background. The emotions experienced during change processes ranged from anxiety to frustration.

The data also showed that the concept of leadership within CPTs was dependent on cultural values. Many participants noted a perceived hierarchical leadership structure within CPTs, while others recognized a need for and valued a shared leadership approach. The data suggested that a multidimensional leadership structure is necessary in order to address the cultural values and differences within a multicultural group.

An unanticipated finding recognized a lack of or unclear mission, vision, and goals in multiple CPTs. Most research participants could not clearly identify the intended mission or long-term goal of their CPT. As a result, many participants noted a lack of buy-in to the CPT process or discounted the value of CPTs altogether. The data implied the current CPT model requires attention and modification in order to establish a shared mission, alleviate ambiguity, develop structure, and evolve into fully functioning and effective CPTs that speak to the cultural differences found among CPT members.

Interpretations of the Findings

While many factors can impact the functionality and effectiveness of PLCs in an international school, the role of culture is apparent, at least to an extent. The data showed four major themes and four subthemes emerge from participant interview responses and supported by direct observation. The interpretation of the findings is presented in relation to identified themes and subthemes. The themes and subthemes were merged in order to provide a better understanding of data interpretation, resulting in four superordinate themes:

- Unclear Mission, No Direction, and a Lack of Buy-In
- The Change Process and Elicited Emotions
- Leadership Structure
- Collaboration, Communication, and Trust

According to Hofstede's (2001) research, each culture has an underlying set of societal values and tendencies that shape perception, behavior, and understanding. This implies that different cultures perceive, interpret, and adapt to circumstances and situations differently. Participants in this study represented four different cultures: (1) American (2) Canadian (3)

French and (4) Polish. The following interpretation of the findings are presented as a response to RQ1:

1. What characteristics of professional learning communities, as defined by DuFour and Eaker (1998), are influenced by international teachers' cultural values identified in Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory?

Unclear Mission, No Direction, and a Lack of Buy-In

Many participants reported to be unaware of the CPT mission and overall goal. Moreover, multiple participants claimed that CPTs are unnecessary. The absence of shared mission, vision, and values implied the current CPT structure is a primary obstacle that negatively influences CPT functionality and effectiveness. However, how teachers work within the boundaries of an unstructured system can be culturally influenced.

According to the data, the majority of research participants suggested the mission and goals of CPTs is unclear,

- “To be quite honest, I’m uncertain of our mission and goals for this year. We don’t have a clear direction”
- “...to be honest, I don’t know the mission”
- “It’s mostly to do with curriculum, is what I’ve figured out”
- “I don’t know that we have necessarily clear mission and goals”

Though some participants identified collaboration and curriculum alignment as a purpose for the CPT, many responses suggested the teachers feel without direction. As a result, some participants discounted the entire CPT process, suggesting a lack of buy-in to the initiative.

- “But I must say that I would live really well without all the CPTs. I say we have too much”

- “Oh, if we’re talking about the CPTs that I’m in right now, I have a hard time finding the value”
- “I haven’t actually figured out really the purpose for the CPT in a clear way, like, I’m still a little confused...”

DuFour and Eaker (1998) described shared understandings and common values as an essential component of effective PLCs. Developing a clear mission, vision, and shared values addresses the fundamental purpose of the CPT, and speaks to the overall mission and identity of the school. According to DuFour et al. (2016), the mission defines the purpose and can help establish priorities that contribute to collective decisions. For an effective CPT, “ensuring that all students can learn must be at the heart of its mission” (DuFour et al, 2016, p. 39). The vision addresses the direction of the PLC and defines what the collective must become in order to accomplish the mission (DuFour et al., 2016). Creating shared values, or a set of group norms that speak to professional and collaborative behavior informs PLC members of the expectations in the group (DuFour et al., 2016). Building a foundation for CPTs to function through shared mission, vision, and values sets the stage for effective functionality of CPTs as members have a sense of why they are meeting, where the group is going, and what is expected of participants.

Creating shared mission, vision and values is critical for CPTs to function effectively (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). In the absence of shared mission, vision, and values, CPT members are left to wander aimlessly in a sea of uncertainty. Klein (2016) posited, “Establishment of shared goals is important as it not only sets the stage for collaboration, but also allows for individuals to work more seamlessly across cultural divides” (p. 261). Hofstede (2011) addressed a culture’s tolerance for ambiguity through the uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), which indicates, “the extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in

unstructured situations” (p. 10). Hofstede (2001) found countries that scored weak on the UAI scale, such as the United States and Canada, function well without structure or rules (Hofstede, 2001). Conversely, countries that score strong on the UAI, such as France and Poland value structure and possess an emotional need for rules (Hofstede, 2001). Creating shared a mission, vision, and set of values establishes a structure, a direction, and set of beliefs for CPT members to work towards.

The collected interview data showed multiple participants could not identify a CPT goal or recognize a clear direction, which suggested a lack of structure within many CPTs. However, observational data provided an illustration of participants in the context of CPT meetings. Observational data suggested the lack of structure or unclear mission did not necessarily impede CPT participation for American and Canadian teachers. Instead, teachers from North American countries contributed to the CPT process, even if they were unsure of the reasons or purpose. However, it is possible that teachers from a Westernized system of education are more familiar with the PLC process and act according to past experiences.

Teachers from France and Poland also contributed to the CPT process, though often asked clarifying questions during the meetings. The need to clarify ambiguous situations is indicative of cultures with a strong UAI (Hofstede et al., 2010). However, the propensity to ask for clarification and guidance could also be attributed to the high PDI of both cultures. Hofstede et al. (2010) suggested that cultures with a high PDI typically expect to be told what to do and rely on superiors for direction. It is also possible that the need for clarifying questions is a result of unfamiliarity with the PLC process in general.

Hofstede (2001) suggested that cultures with a weak UAI could work effectively within an unstructured environment and cultures with a strong UAI could struggle without structure or

direction. Hofstede (2001) also found that cultures with a high PDI often seek direction and clarification. The data indicated the lack of a clear mission, vision, and set of values in multiple CPTs likely played a major role in participant perception and value of the process.

The Change Process and Elicited Emotions

Closely related to a shared mission, vision, and set of values is the process of change. The process of change can be difficult for anyone, regardless of cultural heritage. Ruyam and Cem (2017) argued, “Organizations must always change and renovate themselves in order to survive, be more productive, reach their goals more effectively and have a creative and competitive capacity” (p. 733). Kotter (2012) suggested that a mission and vision play a key role in change initiatives by providing direction, alignment, and inspiration to the collective group. In the absence of a shared mission and vision, change initiatives can “easily dissolve into a list of confusing, incompatible, and time-consuming projects that go in the wrong direction or nowhere at all” (p. 8). Ruyam and Cem (2017) posited the success of change in an educational institution is dependent on the acceptance and adaptability of teachers of the school. However, when change initiatives are plentiful, it is difficult for teachers to accept and adapt.

Fullan (2001) noted the complex nature of change and explained the change process does not mean adopting innovations one after another. A primary function of CPTs is to provide collaborative opportunities for teachers to align curriculum. However, curriculum alignment required an understanding of modern learning theories and a shift in pedagogical practices for many teachers in the CPTs. In addition, other change initiatives seeped into CPT meetings, including daily operations, organizational concerns, and discussions regarding curriculum content. The data showed multiple teachers suggested an unnecessary amount of change,

- “Every week is something different...I feel like I’m wasting my time.”

- “And we have not enough time to get used to something...So many changes and so many important things that we should do.”
- “There are so many things that are on our plate. There’s no room for new things.”
- “So many changes and so many important things that we should do.”

The process of change can evoke many types of emotions, regardless of one’s culture.

However, how one experiences and adapts to the change can be influenced by their cultural heritage. The data also showed a variety of emotions experienced during the change process,

- “I don’t like changes because when you have a change, that means that you go to something which is not known and it’s scary most of the time.”
- “The feeling that I have is the curiosity, it is the first thing, and after I think I'm very anxious.”
- “Sometimes I do get a little bit anxious about these changes because they’re not always mapped out in a way that you know what's going to come.”

Multiple characteristics of effective PLCs can be associated with the change process.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) identified collective inquiry, action orientation and experimentation, and continuous improvement as key components for effective PLCs. Acting as an “engine of improvement, growth, and renewal,” collective inquiry promotes the questioning of the status quo, researching and testing of new methods, and reflecting on the results (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 25). Collective inquiry requires members to seek and test new methods; therefore the relationship with change must be acknowledged. As CPT members are asked to challenge existing pedagogical practices, test new methods, and reflect on practices, the process of change is ignited.

Effective PLCs are action-oriented, unwilling to tolerate inaction, and believe that learning occurs in the context of taking action (DuFour & Eaker, 2016). Moreover, teachers possessing a willingness to experiment with new theories and strategies are essential. Each concept is associated with a perpetual cycle of change, as CPT members are encouraged to seek out new strategies and practices for teaching.

According to DuFour and Eaker (2016), an effective PLC seeks to continuously improve practices and strategies that characterize the PLC process as a whole. “A commitment to continuous improvement is evident in an environment in which innovation and experimentation are viewed not as tasks to accomplish or projects to complete, but as ways of conducting day-to-day business” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 28). Developing a collaborative organizational culture that embraces, rather than resists change, is necessary for CPTs to function effectively.

As a component of collective inquiry and continuous improvement, questioning or accepting the status quo can be related to cultural values. Within the context of a PLC, continuous improvement implies a perpetual cycle of change that constantly seeks new and better methods and members are consistently dissatisfied with the status quo. “A persistent discomfort with the status quo and a constant search for a better way” is necessary for PLCs to evolve (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 28). However, Hofstede (2001) found that countries with a weak UAI have a propensity to question the status quo and seek other ideas, while countries with a strong UAI prefer not to challenge the status quo and instead maintain complacency. Moreover, continuous improvement also means working within the realm of ambiguity and, at times, chaos. Hofstede et al. (2010) suggested strong UAI cultures tend to shun ambiguous situations and seek structure that makes events interpretable and weak UAI cultures are inclined to accept and work within ambiguity. Theoretically, teachers from America and Canada are more apt to challenge

the status quo and accept change, while teachers from France and Poland are prone to embrace the status quo and resist change.

Yet, each participant commented on an overabundance of change initiatives introduced in CPTs, but how participants responded varied by culture. Lewis (2005) asserted that American culture equates “work with success and time is money” (p. 179). Multiple American participants noted feeling “frustrated” and identified the abundance of change initiatives as a “waste of time.” Canadian culture, though less obsessed with the concept of ‘time is money’ dislikes wasting time and unnecessary complications (Lewis, 2005). This idea was reflected in Canadian participants,

- “I’m not opposed to change, but I like to see that it’s going to improve things, make things better.”
- “It depends on what kind of change it is. I think that there’s going to be a good change, then it’s exciting, something that’s interesting and a new challenge. But if the changes like this one for example, that might contradict what we’re supposed to be trying to achieve, then I wouldn’t be very happy about it...”

Conversely, Polish and, to a lesser extent, French, cultures are not typically time-dominated (Lewis, 2005). Considering both cultures’ strong UAI, the amount of changes presented in CPTs established a cycle of ambiguity and contributed to the anxiety experienced by Polish and French participants. DuFour and Eaker (1998) recognized failures for change initiatives, including “schools accepting every change that came along and careening from fad to fad” (p. 48). The data suggested that culture could influence collective inquiry and continuous improvement by stifling the constant cycle of change necessary for further development. In addition, the data implied an underlying issue regarding the introduction of change initiatives, a disorganized plan for change, and a lack of oversight by school leaders.

The change process can also be related to Hofstede's (2001) long-term and short-term orientation (LTO). Long-term orientation is the extent to which members of a society adapt themselves to reach a desirable future and short-term orientation is the extent to which members of a society take their guidance from the past (Hofstede, 2008). Essentially, the LTO measures virtues, or how societies value tradition and are suspicious of change (Hofstede, 2001).

Participants of this research represented four different cultures, three of which are identified as short-term orientated: (1) American (2) Canadian and (3) Polish.

American, Canadian, and Polish cultures scored relatively low on the LTO/STO scale (Hofstede, 2001). Hofstede (2001) found that short-term oriented cultures are prone to analyze new information, typically value traditions, and focus on achieving quick results. The short-term oriented score insinuates that teachers in CPTs might shun, or view with skepticism, certain change initiatives. With a focus on immediate results, short-term goals might work best within the context of CPTs. In addition, an informed explanation of change initiatives and individualized training can speak to the practical mindset of members from short-term oriented cultures.

France scored high on the LTO dimension, suggesting a pragmatic society. Hofstede (2001) suggested that countries with a strong pragmatic focus tend to believe truth is relative and based on context, situation, and time. In relation, traditional concepts are believed to be adaptable to changed circumstances (Hofstede, 2011). Theoretically, this implies that French teachers adapt to circumstances easily and are open to practical changes. The pragmatic nature of French culture can influence the perception of change initiatives, particularly those changes that seem idealistic. This can result in organizational or pedagogical changes viewed as unnecessary or irrelevant.

Lewis (2005) suggested “the agility” of an intercultural team is necessary for the change process, but not all participants are “equally disposed toward change and innovation” (p. 125). Participants reported an overabundance of change initiatives introduced in CPTs. An array of emotions was reportedly experienced as changes were introduced and implemented. The data showed each participant identified the amount of changes, but experienced different emotions during the change process. Cultures such as American and Canadian are likely to experience frustration or apathy during the change process, while cultures like Polish and French are prone to feel anxious of the unknowns associated with change.

Leadership Structure

Lewis (2005) suggested, “Leaders cannot readily be transferred from culture to culture” (p. 104). The leadership structure in CPTs plays an important role in how members participate in collective dialogue, share responsibilities, and work together toward a shared mission (Morrissey, 2000). In the context of CPTs, leadership encompasses and influences each characteristic of effective learning communities. DuFour and Eaker (1998) suggested a shared leadership construct, which involves CPT members in the decision-making processes and empowers members to act. Bass (2008) stated,

Leadership is shared in that any member who sees a need by the team for a leadership role to be played, and believes he or she is competent to do so, calls attention to the problem and attempts to enact the leadership role or encourages other members with more knowledge and expertise to do so. (p. 783)

In such a leadership structure, CPT leaders serve as facilitators rather than leaders.

According to Hofstede (2001), the United States and Canada have a low PDI. Hofstede (2001) found that countries that scored low on the PDI preferred leaders who act as consultants

or facilitators and group members expect to be included in decision-making, particularly if it directly affected their work. American and Canadian cultures tend to value equality, respect for individuals, and leadership knowledge (Hofstede, 2001). Similarly, Lewis (2005) recognized the individualistic and low PDI culture of Americans and their propensity to make decisions without checking with those in charge, explaining, “Anything goes unless it has been restricted” (p. 181). Though similar to American culture in many regards, Canadians tend to approach group meetings democratically and everyone is encouraged to voice their own opinions (Lewis, 2005). The low PDI of American and Canadian cultures implies an avoidance of “pulling rank” among team members and leaders (Lewis, 2005). Instead, group members and leaders work within a framework of shared leadership that promotes a collective responsibility. In a CPT, the idea of shared leadership can exist, as teachers from low PDI cultures tended to view all members, including the facilitator, equal, as evidenced by participant responses,

- “I’m not really comfortable with it [hierarchy], because I’ve come from a place with a very collaborative model...”
- “I don’t think that there really should be a hierarchy. I think that everybody should be on the same plane...The CPT leader is simply the person that’s organizing our time.”

In contrast, Hofstede (2001) found Poland to score high on the PDI, making Poland a hierarchical society. This implies that everyone has a place and social power is a basic fact for Polish people (Hofstede, 2011). Lewis (2005) suggested that during group meetings, Polish people typically take a formal approach where leadership is recognized as a hierarchy and members of the group are courteous and rarely interrupt. Similar behavior was recognized during observations, as Polish participants typically participated with minimal interjections, though did offer feedback or opinions when asked.

The high PDI score also suggests that Polish teachers tend to value a structured school environment and prefer a more teacher-centered approach in the classroom, a reflection of the hierarchical nature of Polish culture. Considering the structure of shared leadership, recognizing and respecting the “system of reciprocal obligations” is important for leaders and facilitators from low PDI cultures when working with colleagues from a hierarchical society (Meyer, 2015, p. 132). Considering the high value placed on hierarchy, it is conceivable that Polish teachers expect CPT leaders to be leaders, rather than facilitators.

Hofstede (2001) also found French culture to score relatively high on the PDI spectrum, suggesting inequality, to a degree, is accepted among individuals. Hofstede (2001) claimed that France “was and still is a class society” resulting in “a system of profound hierarchy” (p. 119). French culture has a preference for a more formal approach to leadership and group meetings. Leaders and group members share a polite and formal tone, prefer extensive discussions when making decisions, and seating is hierarchical (Lewis, 2005). According to Hofstede et al. (2010) the ideal leader in high PDI countries is one who subordinates feel comfortable with and whom they respect. The concept of “packaged leadership...such as management by objectives” does not work since the methods suggest a form of negotiation between leader and follower (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 74). Considering this, a shared leadership structure might impede functionality by offering a forum without guidance. The relationship between high PDI cultures and hierarchical leadership can be found in the responses of Polish and French participants,

- “If there’s nobody in charge saying, we need to do this and this, then nothing’s really going to get done.”
- “I think that this pyramidal system should exist”
- “I think it is important to have somebody in charge”

How leadership is valued, expected, and accepted can be influenced by culture as evidenced in participant responses. In the context of a CPT, the value placed on a hierarchical leadership structure can make the prospect of shared leadership difficult. Aligning with Hofstede's (2001) findings, participant responses in relation to leadership structure of CPTs indicated cultural differences between North American cultures, reflecting a low PDI and French or Polish cultures, which are recognized as high PDI.

Recognizing and respecting the "system of reciprocal obligations" is important for leaders and facilitators from low PDI cultures when working with colleagues from a hierarchical society (Meyer, 2015, p. 132). Shared leadership is a "cooperative endeavor," and one that promotes equality among participants (Bass, 2008, p. 783). CPTs that include members from low PDI countries are likely to thrive with a facilitator, while participants native to high PDI countries will likely need a perceived hierarchical leadership structure.

Collaboration, Communication, and Trust

Klein (2016) suggested, "A belief in collaboration, when paired with a belief in organizational mission and shared goals, creates an environment in which collaboration can not only take hold, but can also be effective and even flourish (p. 260-261). The basic structure of an effective CPT is a group of collaborative teams that share a common purpose. "Building the school's capacity to learn is a collaborative rather than an individual task" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 27). According to the data, all teachers, regardless of nationality, shared a common understanding of collaboration and many value the process:

- "Group work of course, it's teamwork"
- "Basically it's to have a goal in common and to walk together to achieve it"
- "People working towards a common goal"

- “Everyone’s better together”
- “Helping each other in many ways”
- “We’re not islands...I think that on every level of our lives without collaboration, it’s just not natural”
- “Collaboration is people sharing ideas and bouncing ideas off of one another”
- “Working with other people for a common goal”
- “Sharing ideas together”

Thematically, each participant’s response identified key characteristics of the collaborative process, resulting in an idea of “togetherness.” One could presuppose that Hofstede’s (2001) cultural dimension of individualism versus collectivism directly addresses the notion of collaboration and the collaborative processes in a CPT. Hofstede (2001) suggested that individualistic countries prefer loose-knit groupings, while a collectivist society favors close-knit arrangement. However, DuFour et al. (2016) noted, “The PLC process requires an organizational culture that is simultaneously loose and tight” (p. 13). In this sense, effective CPTs allow for an environment of collaboration that is combined with a level of autonomy.

The “loose” aspect of effective PLCs suggests teachers are responsible for analyzing evidence of student learning and are free to use instructional strategies they feel are most effective, which gives teachers autonomous authority to make important decisions (DuFour et al., 2016). At the same time, the PLC process is “tight,” in that there are required elements, such as working collaboratively, taking collective responsibility, establishing a viable curriculum, and creating interventions or extensions to learning, which all members must adhere to (DuFour et al., 2016). “The key to creating a PLC culture that is simultaneously loose and tight is first, getting tight about the right things, and then communicating what is tight clearly, consistently,

and unequivocally” (DuFour et al. 2016, p. 14). Though the culture of each participant was identified as individualist, the data showed participants shared a similar understanding of collaboration, identified by the underlying theme of “togetherness.” The “loose” and “tight” structure of effective PLCs can promote an environment of collaboration while providing some level of autonomy. Considering this, an effective PLC can speak to the values of individualist cultures, as well as collectivist cultures.

Communication. Communication is a fundamental component of collaboration. Effective communication is an essential component to build collaborative teams and supportive conditions in a PLC, but communicating across linguistic and cultural boundaries is difficult (Abramson & Moran, 2018; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Given the multicultural demographic of many international schools, there is a high degree of intercultural communication. Abramson and Moran (2018) define intercultural communication as “a process by which individuals from different cultural backgrounds attempt to share meaning” (p. 46). In an intercultural PLC, communication plays a unique role, as members from different countries collaborate by providing feedback and opinions throughout the process.

How one delivers and receives communication can be influenced by one’s culture. Hofstede (2015) related four dimensions to communication styles (1) Individualism versus Collectivism (2) Long-term versus Short-term Orientation (3) Power Distance Index and (4) Uncertainty Avoidance. Hofstede (2015) suggested that individualist societies prefer direct communication, while collectivist societies like indirect communication. Long-term orientated cultures practice patience when communicating and prefer the written word while short-term orientated cultures seek immediate response and have a preference for oral communication (Hofstede, 2015). “Power Distance is reflected in the extent to which the language used in

communication depends on people's relative position; it also influences people's sources of information" (Hofstede, 2015, p. 5). In the Uncertainty Avoidance Index, countries that score on the weak side, such as the United States and Canada, communication often includes humor and small talk (Hofstede, 2015). Conversely, countries that score high in Uncertainty Avoidance, such as France and Poland, prefer a straightforward and honest approach when communication.

In this study, the collaborative teams were intercultural and in order to share best practices, offer feedback, and provide opinions, communication is vital. The data showed French and Polish teachers are more inclined to offer honest feedback and voice opinions, but also recognized value in practicing restraint. American and Canadian participants also acknowledged the necessity for honest feedback and professional opinions, but often withheld communication due to a perceived lack of trust and an unsupportive environment. Culturally, CPT members "must try to communicate in ways that seem to be received properly as a means to avoid culturally inappropriate actions" (Abramson & Moran, 2018, p. 42). Moreover, CPT leaders must ensure an atmosphere of trust is established that can promote a collaborative environment conducive to sharing ideas, feedback, and opinions.

Trust. Klein (2016) suggested, "collaboration is highly dependent upon building relationships and networks, cultivating trust within the collaborative group, and having a shared vision and common goals" (p. 254). Trust plays a key role in fostering collaboration, creating professional relationships, and establishing the supportive conditions necessary for learning communities to flourish (Way, 2019). Meyer (2015) identified two types of trust: cognitive and affective. Cognitive trust is based on the confidence one feels in another person's accomplishments, skills, and reliability, which comes from the head and is often established through work interactions (Meyer, 2015). On the other hand, affective trust is developed from

emotional closeness, empathy, and friendship, which comes from the heart as people laugh together, relax together, and see each other on a personal level (Meyer, 2015). Hofstede (2001) found that individualistic cultures tend to value tasks over relationships and collectivist cultures value relationships over tasks.

According to Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory, each country represented in this study identifies as an individualistic culture. This implies that research participants develop trust in similar ways, focusing on the task at hand rather than building relationships. However, Meyer (2015) noted that relationship-based societies are rare, as relationships tend to be built slowly on professional credibility and deep emotional connections. The United States, and to a degree Canada, score significantly higher than Poland and France, "suggesting a division of the concept of culture" (Meyer, 2015, p. 171). This suggests it will take a shift in how participants interact with others and patience to build and maintain affective relationships with colleagues.

Multiple participants suggested comfort with sharing opinions and feedback, but only with certain team members. The data suggested a lack of trust among some team members, which can lead to disengaged and unmotivated team members (Lewis, 2005). Considering the collaborative nature of CPTs, cognitive and affective trust is necessary (Meyer, 2015). "This engagement can lead to stronger relationships and better collaborative experiences that move organizations forward and give collaborative individuals the holistic perspective needed to answer complex problems" (Klein, 2016, p. 264). If CPT members do not feel comfortable to communicate with colleagues, the entire collaborative structure is undermined.

Implications for CPT Members and School Leaders

This study explored the influence of culture in intercultural professional learning communities at an international school. The findings of this study revealed that the native culture

of international teachers could influence the fundamental structures of CPTs in four areas:

(1) how teachers work in ambiguity (2) emotions experienced during the change process (3) how leadership is perceived and valued and (4) the role of communication and trust. Each identified area could influence CPT functionality and effectiveness. The following implications address RQ2:

2. What strategies can K-12 teachers employ to better facilitate the functionality and effectiveness of an intercultural PLC at an international school?

Many international schools are comprised of a multicultural teaching faculty as teachers from different cultures come together in an effort to promote student learning and share best practices (Brunton, 2016; Williams, 2019). PLCs can take on many forms as schools adopt the process to suit organizational needs. The research site developed a version known as CPTs, which serve as an avenue for teachers to collaborate and work toward the shared responsibility of student learning.

Working in Ambiguity

According to multiple participants, the shared mission, vision, and values were unclear or nonexistent. The absence of such foundational components negatively impacted buy-in for the initiative. Teachers native to cultures comfortable working within a structured environment, such as American and Canadian cultures, tended to accept the ambiguity more easily. However, establishing a shared mission, vision, and set of values is a fundamental element for successful CPTs. Though teachers from different cultures might be more comfortable working with less structure, each CPT should develop and reiterate a shared, mission, and set of values that all members know and understand.

The Change Process

Participants in this study also noted an overwhelming amount of change initiatives introduced in their CPTs. The unceasing change initiatives elicited a variety of emotions. Teachers from American and Canadian cultures, which are theoretically more adaptable to change, reported experiencing frustration and apathy in response to proposed change. Conversely, teachers from Poland and France reported apprehension and a feeling of anxiousness. However, the process of change can be difficult for anyone. How CPT members accept or adapt to change initiatives, including the emotions experienced, can be influenced by one's cultural background. International schools and members of intercultural learning communities should acknowledge the difficulties associated with change and introduce initiatives in a tactful manner. CPT facilitators and school leaders need to be aware of the number of change initiatives and consider the time it can take for members to accept, understand, and put into practice the intended change.

Practice Multidimensional Leadership

Research participants further reported an unclear leadership structure. Though not identified by Dufour and Eaker (1998) as a characteristic of effective PLCs, leadership plays a key underlying role. The style of leadership most commonly associated with learning communities is shared leadership. Shared leadership provides an avenue to develop a collective mission and vision, as well as shared responsibility for student success. Participants native to cultures where hierarchy is valued, such as French and Polish, noted a need for a leader to direct CPTs. On the contrary, teachers from cultures where equality is embedded since birth, like American and Canadian, showed a preference for shared leadership. School leaders, and especially CPT facilitators, must understand the leadership role and develop a common

understanding of what is needed to improve CPT functionality and effectiveness. Facilitators of CPT meetings will need to have an awareness of the different needs of members and an understanding that leadership can be multidimensional as a means to address cultural values.

The Role of Communication and Trust

The results of this study also indicated that participants possessed a common understanding of collaboration, but due to a perceived unsafe atmosphere, were hesitant to participate in collaborative activities. The need for a safe environment is necessary for collaborative processes to flourish. Participants from each country signified an ease to offer feedback and opinions, but only in the correct context. Many participants perceived feeling a lack of trust within the CPT, which can have detrimental effects on the supportive conditions needed in effective CPTs. However, multiple participants suggested comfort with sharing opinions and feedback, but only to certain team members. CPT facilitators should be aware of the cultural differences of colleagues and how each culture perceives and develops the concept of trust in order to establish the supportive conditions necessary for collaboration.

Summary

This section was an interpretation of the findings of this qualitative instrumental case study. The researcher focused on two research questions to explore the influence of culture, as defined by Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory, on the characteristics of effective PLCs, identified by DuFour and Eaker (1998). The findings aligned with most literature that was reviewed, as they suggested that different cultures perceive change, leadership, and communication differently. The findings showed that culture could influence fundamental components of effective PLCs, including a shared mission and goal, collaborative teams, continuous improvement through change, and the structure of leadership. Additionally, the

findings indicated that the current PLC model at the research site lacks key elements that can provide structure and focus for CPTs to move forward. This shortcoming can create an environment of ambiguity, which is not conducive for all cultures.

Limitations

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore the influence of culture on intercultural PLCs at an international school. This case study was bounded by the setting and participants involved, which limited the generalizability of the research. As another limitation, the small sample size represented in the study might not accurately reflect the cultural differences in intercultural PLCs. Moreover, an intercultural PLC is comprised of multiple cultures, meaning the findings might not be applicable in monocultural PLCs.

The subjective nature inherent to interpretation could also be a limitation. The researcher was the sole interpreter of the data. Though all effort was made to ensure accurate data collection and analysis, it is possible the researcher's cultural values influenced how the data was perceived and interpreted. In addition, preexisting relationships could also be considered a limitation. This case study was conducted at a school where the researcher was employed and relationships with colleagues were already developed.

Participants also add to the limitations of this study. Participants of this study represented four cultures; therefore some are non-native English speakers. Though the official language at the research site is English and each participant is recognized as fluent English speakers, there remains a possibility that interview questions were misunderstood or misconstrued. In addition, there is also a possibility that research participants could not fully explain intended responses to interview questions, making collected data incomplete.

An unanticipated limitation emerged during the course of this study. The data showed multiple participants were unaware of the CPT mission and goal. As a result, many participants noted a lack of buy-in to the CPT process. As noted in earlier chapters of this research, it was assumed that each CPT was structured and operated in a similar manner. This study discovered a perceived inconsistency among CPTs in regard to mission and goals. Without an identifiable and clear mission or goal, research participants could not elaborate on questions regarding shared mission, visions, and values. Therefore, the absence of a clear mission and goal could have limited or influenced participant interview responses.

Findings Related to the Literature

A review of the literature for this study indicated that culture plays a unique and influential role in individuals. How one perceives reality, understands change, and communicates is partly constructed from the culture in which one is raised (Hofstede, 2001). This concept implies that individuals construct reality differently due to cultural heritage.

Hofstede (2001) defined culture as “mental programming” that helps to shape one’s perception, values, and behaviors. A common characteristic of international schools is a multicultural faculty (Williams, 2019). Many international schools are comprised of teachers and assistants from different countries and cultures, creating a multicultural environment driven by different cultural beliefs and values. Curnett (2016) stated “There are considerable cultural differences between the PLC world of the United States and the arena for which we are considering it in international schools, but this reality should not deter us...” (p. 45). Toole and Louis (2002) acknowledged the tensions of national culture and values within the context of PLCs. A review of the literature for this study indicated that cultural differences found in a multicultural staff could have an impact on the effectiveness of an organization.

Past research acknowledged the influence of culture in an educational setting. Hallinger and Kantamara (2001) found that culture could influence methods of communication. As CPT facilitators organize and guide meetings, how messages or directives are delivered and received is significant. Abramson and Moran (2018) included nonverbal communication as a possible conflict, suggesting the same signal carries different meanings in different cultures and interpreting nonverbal signals can be ambiguous. In the context of a PLC, this study found that culture could influence the sharing of opinions and feedback. This study also recognized the importance of cross-cultural trust and its relationship with effective communication. How a message is communicated, implicitly or explicitly, and received is a key aspect of collaboration, which is the cornerstone of effective PLCs.

According to Hallinger and Kantamara (2001), cultural influences on communication extended to the process of change and perceived hierarchy in the PLC. Effective communication is a critical component of the change process, but insufficient attention to communication is often cited as cause of failed change (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Kotter, 2012). Within the context of an intercultural PLC, effective communication is vital due to the collaborative nature. Abramson and Moran (2018) argued that communication is a reflection of cultural values and philosophical thought. Hallinger and Kantamar (2001) noted that Thai teachers needed messages and directives explicitly stated in order to engage in the change process. Consequently, teachers receiving directives perceived a hierarchy within the PLC, a cultural value of Thai culture (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2001; Hofstede, 2001). Similarly, this study found the interwoven nature of cultural values and tendencies, as many participants perceived the change process or leadership related to time or structure.

A top-down approach contradicts the concept of shared leadership, an approach that multiple PLC proponents suggest for effective PLCs (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour et al. 2016; Hord, 1997). A shared leadership structure in PLCs can create an environment where change initiatives and tasks are divided based on teachers' expertise and interest, which can promote shared responsibility and buy-in for participants (Jäppinen, 2015). However, Hofstede (2001) found cultures with a high PDI value a hierarchy, which can undermine a shared leadership approach in intercultural PLCs. The findings of this study also showed a stronger value placed on hierarchy in high PDI cultures. To circumvent this concern, CPT facilitators will need to understand the needs and cultural values of members while creating collaborative opportunities where all members can display their expertise and interest. In addition, CPT facilitators will need to be flexible in their leadership approach and style.

Change is often a part of the PLC process, as many serve as avenues for change initiatives to be introduced and implemented. Fahrney et al. (2016) discussed the implementation of PLCs in an international school in Singapore. Many international schools are comprised of teachers from different cultures, some of whom are familiar with Westernized notions of educational practices. Fahrney et al. (2016) acknowledged the different ideas of PLCs found among the staff, suggesting the concept can be influenced by the educational system in which teachers are exposed. In this regard, cultural differences stemming from educational ideologies can act as an obstacle if teachers are unfamiliar with the PLC process.

Past research also indicated the need for cultural intelligence in a group setting. Routamaa and Hautala (2008) suggested members involved with an intercultural team should possess self-knowledge and an understanding of the cultural values within the team. Saint-Jacques (2012) asserted the importance of communication within an intercultural environment

through cultural knowledge. Abramson and Moran (2018) posited that effective leaders must understand the customs, values, and protocols in an intercultural setting, as well as the national character and mindsets of colleagues. Keung (2011) argued the need for cultural awareness in an international school, suggesting the concept should be included in leadership selection and added to the professional development of the staff. The cultural differences found in an international school and, by extension, an intercultural PLC could influence the functionality and effectiveness of the group. For school leaders and PLC facilitators, understanding cultural values and tendencies becomes a necessity for success.

According to Hofstede et al. (2012) cross-cultural misunderstandings are an underestimated cause of tensions and issues within a multicultural organization. The tensions and issues associated with cultural differences can have a negative influence on intercultural learning communities in international schools. Livermore (2015) suggested cultural awareness and intelligence is directly tied to personal and organizational performance and everyone can grow in cross-cultural collaborative practices. This study found that culture does influence how CPTs function and supports the idea that international school educators should develop an awareness of and adapt to the cultural values and tendencies of colleagues in order to create an environment for effective collaboration.

Recommendations for Research Site

The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of culture on intercultural PLCs at an international school. An emphasis was placed on the national culture of teachers who regularly take part in the collaborative processes of a PLC. This study utilized Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory as the theoretical framework and related each dimension to DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of effective PLCs.

As a case study, this research focused on one international school in the European Union. The school had a multicultural staff of approximately 60 faculty members that represented ten different countries. Ten teachers from four different countries took part in the study. All teachers who participate in weekly CPT meetings, as well as each CPT leader and members of the school leadership team, can potentially benefit from the collected data and findings. The following recommendations can inform a well-designed CPT model that caters to the multicultural characteristics and expectations of the teachers involved.

Recommendation 1: Build on Existing Knowledge and Develop a PLC model

The first recommendation is to take advantage of the expertise held by current CPT facilitators and build on the existing knowledge. DuFour et al. (2016) suggested those who want to establish PLCs must begin by acknowledging that no one person can lead a complex change initiative until it becomes ingrained in an organization's culture without first gaining support of key staff members. Kimball (2016) stated, "effective organizations fully utilize the talents of their people, recognizing that an organization's human capacity is their most valuable asset" (p. 18). The school currently has CPT facilitators in place, each with essential insight into the CPT process and their group members. Utilizing current CPT leaders' knowledge, it is recommended that the school develop or adapt and modify an existing PLC model that addresses the needs of the school, the intended change initiatives, and the teachers involved. Current CPT leaders can act as a guiding coalition and identify the key characteristics necessary for CPT functionality (DuFour et al., 2016). CPT facilitators can also communicate, model, and reiterate the concepts in order to ensure members understand each and to promote collaborative consistency among CPTs.

Recommendation 2: Develop Long and Short-Term Goals

Parker (2006) suggested, “Call it a mission, goal, charter, or task, but a team must know why it exists and what it should be doing at the end of a day’s meeting, by the end of the quarter, at year’s end, or perhaps five years from now” (p. 656). To address CPTs with an unclear mission and vision and create structure, administrators, along with teachers, should build on the current vision of the school and develop a shared mission, vision, and set of values that speak to the collaborative culture necessary for effective CPTs to flourish. DuFour et al. (2016) note, “If a mission is to be truly shared, it must be co-created, not sold, and co-creation requires a process that fully engages others” (p. 27). It is recommended that the collective mission, vision, and shared values work within the framework of DuFour et al. (2016) four essential PLC questions:

1. What do we want each student to learn?
2. How will we know when each student has learned it?
3. How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?
4. How will we respond when a student has already learned essential knowledge and skills?

In addition, it is recommended that CPT members collectively create and set short-term, or quarterly, goals that closely align with the newly created mission, vision, and values. The short-term goals should “reinforce the premise that the team must (1) focus on improved results rather than implementing activities and (2) clarify how the achievement of the goal will be attained, monitored, and measured (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 107). The short-term goals can serve as checkpoints and CPT members can have a better understanding of the overall mission.

Recommendation 3: Clarify Leadership Structure

It is recommended that school leaders and CPT facilitators clarify the CPT leadership position and promote shared leadership in CPTs. Klein (2016) noted, “In order for collaboration

across cultural difference to work, issues of power must be addressed and all of the players involved must feel that they play an equitable role in the process” (p. 262). Promoting a shared leadership approach can enhance the shared responsibility and increase the buy-in needed for CPTs to function effectively and continuously improve.

The distinction between leader and facilitator can be a grey area, but a common understanding among teaching staff can alleviate stress for CPT members. Abramson and Moran (2018) suggested that effective leaders must understand the customs, values, national character and mindsets of colleagues in an intercultural setting. It is recommended that CPT leaders include the role of facilitator within a shared leadership structure. This leadership structure can provide teachers with a sense of hierarchy within CPTs while promoting equality among CPT members. Accepting the concept of facilitator, along with leader, speaks to the cultural values of hierarchy and equality and can better accommodate intercultural CPTs.

As a means to increase buy-in, it is also recommended that school leaders consolidate weekly staff meetings and prioritize CPT time. If building a collaborative organizational culture through CPTs is shown to be a priority for school leaders, then teachers are more likely to place value on the model. In addition, it is recommended that school leaders provide professional development for teachers regarding shared leadership structures and the role of CPT facilitator.

Recommendation 4: Create Processes to Monitor CPTs

As the development of CPTs at the research site continues, it is likely that cultural differences will emerge. As a means to continue building effective learning communities and alleviate possible cultural tensions it is recommended that school leaders create processes to monitor CPTs. DuFour et al. (2016) suggested, “When school leaders establish clear expectations and parameters...they create a process that promotes consistency and engages

teachers in ways that encourage ownership and commitment” (p. 126). The aforementioned leadership structure and CPT guidelines set forth by school leaders and CPT facilitators “demand accountability because a team must be able to demonstrate that its decisions have led to more students achieving at higher levels” and that newly implemented teaching practices and learning theories are successful (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 126). Considering this, evidence of improvement is essential.

It is also recommended that school leaders regularly observe each CPT and collect data from members in order to gauge understanding, needs, and interests. DuFour et al. (2016) suggested, “What gets monitored, gets done” (p. 35). An effective CPT realizes “its efforts to develop shared mission, vision, and values; engage in collective inquiry; build collaborative teams; take action; and focus on continuous improvement must be assessed on the basis of results rather than intentions” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 29). The intention of CPTs is to create collaborative opportunities for teachers, but there is currently no immediate data to prove results. DuFour and Eaker (1998) argued, “Unless initiatives are subject to ongoing assessments on the basis of tangible results, they represent random groping in the dark rather than purposeful improvement” (p. 29). Regular observations of CPTs can also provide insight into functionality and identify areas for improvement. Moreover, offering an opportunity for CPT members to voice opinions and provide feedback can increase buy-in and the idea of shared responsibility. Collected data and observational notes can inform decisions that cater to teachers’ professional needs and cultural values.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, two areas have been identified as prospects for further research. The first prospect involves further exploration of culture within CPTs at the

research site. A second prospect for further research requires a shift in research design, setting, and participants. Both recommendations for further research can contribute to the existing literature related to multicultural organizations, PLCs, and intercultural teams.

Determine Cultural Values

The first prospect for future research takes place at the research site. In order to develop a better understanding of cultural influences within CPTs, it is recommended that each CPT member take part in a study focused on cultural values.

Klein (2016) suggested,

Indeed, collaboration comes down to the work of a group of individuals. Thus, it is important to understand who individual collaborators are, what drives them, how they interact with others and the cultural contexts and environments in which they collaborate. Boundary spanning concepts are important to understanding individual behaviors because the attributes of boundary spanners are the means by which they interact with their environment. (p. 256)

Understanding the cultural values among staff members can provide insight into developing CPT structures that address cultural differences. Additionally, increasing the number of participants from the research site can offer CPT facilitators and school leaders a broader idea of how culture manifests itself within the context of CPTs.

Research Design, Scope, and Participants

The second prospect for future research is applicable in other international schools and recommends a different design, setting, and sample. As PLCs, or some variation, become more commonplace in international schools, further research is necessary to better understand the complexities of culture within these collaborative groups. Though a case study approach can

yield essential data, especially for a specific site, other research designs can possibly dig deeper or include more participants. Undertaking a multiple methods approach that includes a large sample at multiple sites could offer an opportunity for theory development or contribute to the existing literature on culture, PLCs, and/or international schools.

Conclusion

This qualitative instrumental case study explored the influence of culture within an intercultural PLC at an international school. The theoretical framework of the study was based on Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory and focused on DuFour and Eaker's (1998) characteristics of effective PLCs. Research questions inquired about cultural values and tendencies in relation to each PLC characteristic and suggested strategies for facilitators and school leaders to better accommodate a multicultural faculty. The study expanded on the existing literature related to national culture and PLCs. In addition, the qualitative case study addressed the limited literature focused on international schools and a multicultural teaching faculty. Thematic analysis of data collected from a demographic questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and direct observations identified components of CPTs influenced by the culture of teachers, such as shared mission and values, collaboration, leadership, the change process. The study also presented recommendations for action, including adapting or modifying a PLC model, clarifying the role of leader, and creating processes to monitor each CPT. This study also recommended ideas for future research that can contribute to the findings and provide a better understanding of the influence of culture within PLCs.

Klein (2016) stated, "In order to reap the benefits of collaboration, it is important to understand the role of individuals collaborating across these cultural boundaries – how they approach collaborative difference and how boundary-driven cultural differences shape their

actions and choices” (p. 254). The findings of the study suggested that culture could influence the fundamental principles of PLCs. Each identified theme identified in the study can undermine the entire PLC and collaborative processes involved. Abramson and Moran (2018) cautioned, “There is a danger in trying to compartmentalize a complex concept like culture, while trying to retain a sense of its whole. Culture is a complex system of interrelated parts that must be understood holistically” (p. 17). In an intercultural PLC, the complexities of culture are interwoven throughout the collaborative processes, influencing communication, trust, perception of leadership, and the emotions experienced during the change process. CPT facilitators interested in creating collaborative teams will need to be cognizant of and adapt to cultural differences and the level of support for collaboration that exists within each member (Toole & Louis, 2002). By considering the recommendations for action and future research, the research site, teachers, and school leaders can move towards creating an environment of collaboration that can recognize and accommodate the cultural differences found among the teaching faculty.

References

- Abramson, N. R., & Moran, R. T. (2018). *Managing cultural differences global leadership for the 21st century*. London: Routledge.
- Ailon, G. (2008). Mirror, mirror on the wall: Cultures' consequences in A Value Test of its Own Design. *Academy of Management Review*, 33(4), 885-904.
doi:10.5465/amr.2008.34421995
- Allen, B. M. (2011). *Teaching across borders: Business as usual?* (Doctoral dissertation). UMI Dissertation Publishing.
- Anderson, J. S. (2010). *The experiences of expatriate teachers in international schools: five ethnographic case studies* (dissertation).
- Anfara, V. A., & Mertz, N. (2015). *Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Ang, S., Dyne, L. V., Koh, C., Ng, K. Y., Templer, K. J., Tay, C., & Chandrasekar, N. A. (2007). Cultural intelligence: Its measurement and effects on cultural judgment and decision making, cultural adaptation and task performance. *Management and Organization Review*, 3(03), 335-371. doi:10.1111/j.1740-8784.2007.00082.x
- Baskerville, R. F. (2003). Hofstede never studied culture. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 28(1), 1-14. doi:10.1016/s0361-3682(01)00048-4
- Bass, B. M. (2008). *The Bass handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, Inc.
- Berkvens, J. B. (2017). The importance of understanding culture when improving education: Learning from Cambodia. *International Education Studies*, 10(9), 161-174.
doi:10.5539/ies.v10n9p161

- Bing, J. W. (2004). Hofstede's consequences: The impact of his work on consulting and business practices. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 18(1), 80-87.
doi:10.5465/ame.2004.12689609
- Bird, A., & Osland, J. S. (2005). Making sense of intercultural collaboration. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 35(4), 115-132.
doi:10.1080/00208825.2005.11043739
- Bissessar, C. (2018). An application of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension among female educational leaders. *Education Sciences*, 8(2), 77. doi:10.3390/educsci8020077
- Blankenship, S. S., & Ruona, W. E. (2007). Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice: A Comparison of Models, Literature Review. Online Submission. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED504776>
- Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, M. (2016). *Completing your qualitative dissertation a roadmap from beginning to end*. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2012) Thematic analysis. In Cooper, H. (Ed.), *The Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Brunton, G. S. (2016). Collaboration within intercultural professional learning communities: A case study. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. (Accession Order No. 10125784)
- Bolman, L. & Deal, T. (2006). Reframing change: Training, realigning, negotiating, grieving and moving on. In J. V. Gallos (Ed.), *Organization development* (447-469). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

- Collaboration. (2019). In *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary* (11th ed.). Retrieved September 4, 2019 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collaboration?src=search-dict-hed>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W. and Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39, 3, pp. 124-131.
- Curnett, J. (2016). Understanding the international schoolteacher. In T. Stuart (Ed.), *Global Perspectives: Professional learning communities at work in international schools* (p. 36 – 50). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2012). *School leaders' guide to professional learning communities at Work*. Bloomington: Solution Tree Press.
- Dufour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., Many, T. W., & Mattos, M. (2016). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- DuFour, R. (2011). Work together: But only if you want to. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(5), 57–61.

- Expatriate. (2019). In *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary* (11th ed.). Retrieved September 4, 2019 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/expatriate>
- Fahrney, D., Stuart, T., Pratt, D., & Hoss, D. (2016). Transforming the Singapore International School. In T. Stuart (Ed.), *Global perspectives: Professional learning communities at work in international schools* (p. 169 – 186). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Flick, U. (2014). *The Sage handbook of qualitative data analysis*. Los Angeles: Sage.
Retrieved from: https://www.ewi-psy.fu-berlin.de/einrichtungen/arbeitsbereiche/qualitative_sozial-_bildungsforschung/Medien/58869_Flick__The_SAGE_HB_of_Qualitative_Data_Analysis_Chapter1_mapping-the-field.pdf
- Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London: Falmer Press.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change: Being effective in complex times*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2016). *The NEW meaning of educational change*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Gray, J., & Summers, R. (2015). International professional learning communities: The role of enabling school structures, trust, and collective efficacy. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 14(3), 61-75.
- Gibbs, J. L. (2009). Culture as kaleidoscope: Navigating cultural tensions in global collaboration. *Proceedings of the ACM International Workshop on Intercultural Collaboration*, 8998. New York: ACM.

- Gray, J., & Summers, R. (2015). International professional learning communities: The role of enabling school structures, trust, and collective efficacy. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 14(3), 61-75.
- Gudykunst, W. B. (2007). *Cross-cultural and intercultural communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (2011). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes*. (3rd ed., pp. 67-91). New York, NY: Pearson Education.
- Hallinger, P. & Kantamara, P. (2001). Exploring the cultural context of school improvement in Thailand. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 12(4), 385-408.
doi:10.1076/sesi.12.4.385.3446
- Hayden, M. (2006). *Introduction to international education: International schools and their communities*. London, England: Sage.
- Hayton, J. C., George, G., & Zahra, S. A. (2002). National culture and entrepreneurship: A review of behavioral research. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 26(4), 33–52.
doi: 10.1177/104225870202600403
- Helliwell, J., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. (2018). *World Happiness Report 2018*, New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network.
- Hodge, S. (2000). *Global smarts: The art of communicating and deal making anywhere in the world*. New York, NY: Wiley.
- Hofstede, G. (1983). The cultural relativity of organizational practices and theories. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 75-89.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA; London: Sage Publications.

- Hofstede, G. (2002). Dimensions do not exist: A reply to Brendan McSweeney. *Human Relations*, 55(11), 1355–1361. doi: 10.1177/0018726702055011921
- Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede Model in context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). doi:10.9707/2307-0919.1014
- Hofstede, G. (2015). Culture and Communication. In D. Brzozowska & W. Chłopicki (Ed.), *Cultures software: communication styles* (p. 5 – 14). Cambridge Scholars Publisher.
- Hofstede, G.H. (2008) ‘Cultural differences in teaching and learning’, Presented at the FUHU Conference on Education and Training in the Multicultural Classroom Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. Revised and Expanded 3rd Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hofstede, G. J., Hofstede, G., & Pedersen, P. B. (2012). *Exploring culture: Exercises, stories and synthetic cultures*. Boston: Intercultural Press.
- Hord, S. M. (1997). *What is a PLC?* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Retrieved from http://www.SEDLLetter_v19n01.pdf
- Huffman, J. B., & Hipp, K. K. (2003). *Reculturing schools as professional learning communities*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Education.
- International School Consultancy. (n.d.). *ISC research: The market*. Retrieved October 20, 2019, from <https://www.iscresearch.com/about-us/the-market>.
- Ishii, S., Klopff, D., Cooke, P. (2012). Worldview in Intercultural Communication: A Religio-Cosmological Approach. In L.A. Samovar, R.E. Porter, & E.R. McDaniel (Ed.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (p. 56-64). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

- Jackson, A. (2013, February 15). Collective Inquiry. Retrieved June 15, 2019, from https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/global_learning/2013/02/how_teachers_learn.html
- Jäppinen, A-K., Leclerc, M., & Tubin, D. (2015). Collaborativeness as the core of professional learning communities beyond culture and context: Evidence from Canada, Finland, and Israel. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 27(3), 315–332. doi: 10.1080/09243453.2015.1067235
- Jones, M. (2007). Hofstede - Culturally questionable? In *Oxford Business & Economics Conference, Oxford, UK, 24–26 June*.
- Karadeniz, O., & İncirci, A. (2016). A Study of Developing Multicultural Awareness in Teacher Education: Watch, Write and Talk a Movie. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(34), 81-90.
- Kastner, P. M. (2015). *Educator perceptions of the impact of professional learning communities on professional growth and student learning* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation).
- Keung, E. K. (2011). *What factors of cultural intelligence predict transformational leadership: A study of international school leaders* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Liberty University.
- Kimball, C. (2016). Building a PLC culture in international schools: A superintendent's perspective. In T. Stuart (Ed.), *Global perspectives: Professional learning communities at work in international schools* (p. 36 – 50). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Klein, C. (2016). Negotiating cultural boundaries through collaboration: The roles of motivation, advocacy and process. *Innovative Higher Education*, 42(3), 253-267. doi:10.1007/s10755-016-9382-7

- Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2017). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice, 24*(1), 120–124. doi: 10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092
- Kotter, J. P. (2012). *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Lavrakas, P. J. (2008). *Encyclopedia of survey research methods* (Vols. 1-0). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412963947
- Lee, J. H. (2015). Challenges of internationally educated teachers in the U.S. Public School System. *International Education Studies, 8*(3), 44-54. doi:10.5539/ies.v8n3p44
- Lee, D. H. L., & Lee, W. O. (2018). Transformational change in instruction with professional learning communities? The influence of teacher cultural disposition in high power distance contexts. *Journal of Educational Change, 19*(4), 463–488. doi: 10.1007/s10833-018-9328-1
- Leonard, L. & Leonard, P. (2003). The continuing trouble with collaboration: Teachers talk. *Current Issues in Education* [on line] 6,(15). Available <http://cie.ed.asu.edu/volume6/number15/>
- Leonardi, P. M., & Rodriguez-Lluesma, C. (2013). Occupational stereotypes, perceived status differences, and intercultural communication in global organizations. *Communication Monographs, 80*(4), 478-502. doi:10.1080/03637751.2013.828155
- Lewis, R. D. (2005). *When cultures collide: Leading across cultures* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Brealey.
- Lewis, J., Asberry, J., DeJarnett, G., & King, G. (2016). The best practices for shaping school culture for instructional leaders. *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership, 3*, 57-63.

- Lijadi, A. A., & Schalkwyk, G. J. V. (2016). “The international schools are not so international after all”: The educational experiences of Third Culture Kids. *International Journal of School & Educational Psychology*, 6(1), 50–61. doi: 10.1080/21683603.2016.1261056
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. In D. D. Williams (Ed.), *Naturalistic evaluation* (pp. 73–84). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Livermore, D. A. (2015). *Leading with cultural intelligence the real secret to success*. New York, NY: American Management Association.
- Machin, D. (2017). The great Asian international school Gold Rush: An economic analysis. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 16(2), 131–146. doi: 10.1177/1475240917722276
- Marion, R. & Gonzales, L.D. (2014). *Leadership in education: Organizational theory for the practitioner* (2nd ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Maloney, C. & Konza, D. (2011). A case study of teachers’ professional learning: Becoming a community of professional learning or not? *Issues in Educational Research*, 21(1), 75–87.
- McSweeney, B. (2002). Hofstede’s Model of National Cultural Differences and their consequences: A triumph of faith - a failure of analysis. *Human Relations*, 55(1), 89-118. doi:10.1177/0018726702551004
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Meyer, E. (2015). *The culture map: Decoding how people think, lead, and get things done across cultures*. New York: Public Affairs.

- Morrissey, M.S. (2000). Professional learning communities: An ongoing exploration. Austin, Texas: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Nagrath, C. (2011, August 26). What Makes a School International? Retrieved October 20, 2019, from https://tieonline.com/view_article.cfm?articleid=87.
- O'Brien, B. (2019, February 5). What Is the Meaning of Cultural Awareness? Retrieved October 4, 2019, from <https://classroom.synonym.com/what-is-the-meaning-of-cultural-awareness-12084258.html>.
- Parker, G.M. (2006). What makes a team effective or ineffective? In J. V. Gallos (Ed.), *Organization development* (656-680). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Paslay, L. (2017). *The Benefits and Challenges of Establishing a Professional Learning Community Through the Lens of Tiered Instruction: Principal and Teacher Perspective* (Doctoral dissertation, Northwest Nazarene University, 2017). Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest.
- Pearce, R. (2014). The search for better ways of speaking about culture, identity and values. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 9(4), 387–401. doi: 10.2304/rcie.2014.9.4.387
- Peterson, K. & Deal, T. (1998, September). How leaders influence the culture of schools. *Educational Leadership*, 56(1), 28-30.
- Provini, C. (2013). Why Don't Professional Learning Communities Work? Retrieved August 6, 2019, from https://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/professional-learning-community-pitfalls-best-practices.shtml.
- Ravitch, S. M., & Riggan, M. (2017). *Reason & rigor: How conceptual frameworks guide research*. Los Angeles; London ; New Delhi ; Singapore ; Washington DC: SAGE.

- Richards, N. (1998). Emperor's new clothes? The issue of staffing in international schools. In M. Hayden & Thompson, J. (Eds.), *International education: Principles and practice* (pp. 173-183). London: Kogan Page.
- Routamaa, V., & Hautala, T. M. (2008). Understanding cultural differences: The values in a cross-cultural context. *International Review of Business Research Papers*, 4(5), 129-137.
- Ruyam, K., & Cem, T. (2017). Secondary school teachers' perceptions on their schools' openness to change. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 12(15), 732-743.
doi:10.5897/err2017.3307
- Saint-Jacques, B. (2012). Intercultural Communication in a Globalized World. In L.A. Samovar, R.E. Porter, & E.R. McDaniel (Ed.), *Intercultural communication: A reader* (p. 45-56). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Samovar, L. A., Porter, R. E., & McDaniel, E. R. (2012). *Intercultural communication: A reader*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Sanderson, G. (2007). The strengths and limitations of using essentialist cultural theory to understand international students. In 2007 ISANA International Conference "Student Success in International Education" (pp. 1–10). Adelaide, Australia.
- Schipper, J. (2014). *Establishing Inquiry-Based Professional Learning Communities in an International School* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation) UMI Dissertation Publishing.
- Schussler, D. L., Bercaw, L. A., & Stooksberry, L. M. (2008). Using case studies to explore teacher candidates' intellectual, cultural, and moral dispositions. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Spring, 105-122.

- Sharma, G. (2017). Pros and cons of different sampling techniques. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 3(7), 749-752.
- Siakas, K. V., Georgiadou, E., & Balstrup, B. (2010). Cultural impacts on knowledge sharing: Empirical data from EU project collaboration. *Vine*, 40(3/4), 376-389.
doi:10.1108/03055721011071476
- Simon, M. K., & Goes, J. (2013). *Assumption, limitations, delimitations, and scope of the study* (Doctoral dissertation, Dissertation and Scholarly Research: Recipes for success).
- Sims, R. A. (2016). Cultural intelligence as a predictor of job satisfaction and intent to renew contract among expatriate international school teachers in Latin America (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2011). Trident University International.
- Singapore American School. (2017, December). School Finance 705: Teacher Demographics 2017–18. Retrieved September 8, 2018, from <https://www.sas.edu.sg/news-post/~post/school-finance-705-teacher-demographics-201718-20171129>
- Slavin, R. E. (2007). *Educational research in an age of accountability*. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Smith, P., & Dugan, S. (1996). National culture and the values of organizational employees. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 27(2), 231-259.
- Stake, R. E. (2010). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publ.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional Learning Communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, 7, 221-258.
doi:10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8
- Stuart, T. S. (2016). *Global perspectives: Professional Learning Communities at work in international schools*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

- Talbert, J. E. (2010). Professional learning communities at the crossroads: How systems hinder or engender change. *Second International Handbook of Educational Change*, 555-571.
doi:10.1007/978-90-481-2660-6_32
- Tendency. (2019). In *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary* (11th ed.). Retrieved September 17, 2019 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tendency>
- Thorne, S. (2000). Data analysis in qualitative research. *Evidence Based Nursing*, 3, 68–70.
- Toole, J. & Louis, K.S. (2002). The role of Professional Learning Communities in international education. In Leithwood & Hallinger (Eds.), *Second International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration* (p. 245 – 279). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Tylor, E. B. (1871). *Primitive culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, art, and custom*. London: J. Murray.
- Voelkel, R. H. (2011). A case study of the relationship between collective efficacy and professional learning communities (Unpublished doctoral dissertation) UC San Diego.
- Watzlawick, P., Bavelas, J. B., & Jackson, D. D. (2014). *Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Way, J. (2019). *The Role of Trust in Teacher Professional Learning Communities* (dissertation). ProQuest LLC, Ann Arbor, MI.
- Wei, L. (2010), “Virtual knowledge sharing in a cross/cultural context”, *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 14(1), pp. 38/50

- Williams, D. (2019). *Going Global: A Phenomenological Case Study of Self-Efficacy In An International School's Professional Learning Communities* (dissertation). ProQuest LLC, Ann Arbor, MI.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Yoo, A. J. (2014). The effect Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions have on student-teacher relationships in the Korean context. *Journal of International Education Research (JIER)*, 10(2), 171. doi:10.19030/jier.v10i2.8519

Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age and gender?
2. What is your nationality?
3. How closely do you align with your nationality?
4. How long have you been teaching?
5. How long have you been at ISE?
6. What do you teach?
7. How long have you been teaching abroad?
8. How long have you worked with people from another culture?
9. From what country did you obtain your education credentials?
10. What prompted your decision to become an international educator?

Appendix B

Exploring the Influence of Culture in an Intercultural Professional Learning Community

Heading: *Exploring the Influence of Culture in an Intercultural Professional Learning Community*

Name of Interviewer: Eric Johnson

Name of Interviewee:

Location of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Interview Instructions:

Hello, thank you agreeing to meet with me to discuss culture and professional learning communities (PLCs) at our school. The term professional learning community has many different meanings. For the purpose of this study, the term PLCs will reflect the school's current structure, which you know as collaborative planning teams (CPTs). As you know, I am currently enrolled in doctoral program at the University of New England and this interview is part of my dissertation research project. I appreciate your interest in this study as you represent a different culture than your colleagues. I respect your personal and professional background and look forward to learning about your perspective during this process. This interview should not last longer than 1 hour. In addition to gaining knowledge about your national culture and the role it might play in CPTs, I will also gain a better understanding of the research and interview processes. With your permission, I will record this session and then have it professionally transcribed. Recording this interview will ensure that our communication exchanges are accurate and trustworthy. Once the transcription is completed, I will provide you a copy so you can confirm its accuracy. The data will be used for my dissertation and I hope the findings provide insight into CPT functionality and produces strategies to overcome any identified cultural differences. I will remove all identifying information for confidentiality purposes, keep the data encrypted on my laptop with an encrypted backup copy stored on an external hard drive and locked in a safe at my residence. This interview is voluntary; please feel free to decline to answer any questions. Do I have your permission to proceed with the recording? Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Introduction: As international educators, we are in a unique position to experience different cultures every day. The intention of this research is to explore the influence of culture in CPTs here at ISE. The school leadership team currently supports this plan. This research focuses on different aspects of CPTs, such as leadership, collaboration, and changes in pedagogy in an effort to illuminate cultural differences and discover what influence culture might have in the groups. During this interview, I would like to hear your perceptions regarding the functionality and effectiveness of CPTs. As an international educator, your opinion and insight are incredibly valuable for this exploration. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Okay, let's begin. I am now recording.

First, Tell me about your CPT. Which subjects are involved? What nationalities are represented?

POWER DISTANCE INDEX

Question: Tell me your CPTs mission and goals for this year.

Follow up 1: What was your role in developing the shared mission and goals?

Follow up 2: Is it important for you to be involved in that process?

Notes:

An identified characteristic of a successful PLC is the shared leadership structure.

Question: What characteristics do you value in a leader?

Follow up: What would you say is the most effective leadership style for a CPT leader?

Follow up: What qualities of a leader are you most comfortable with in your CPT?

Notes:

Question: Tell me how you feel about leadership as a hierarchy.

Notes:

Question: What is your comfort level when it comes to contradicting someone in a position of authority?

Follow up: Tell me about a time when you contradicted a leader. Have there been similar situations in your CPT?

Follow up: How did the CPT leader react?

Notes:

INDIVIDUALISM VERSUS COLLECTIVISM

Question: Which do you value more? Being personally responsible for your own success and achievements or working within the values and goals of your CPT?

Follow up: Tell me about the reasoning behind your response.

Notes:

Question: How do you define collaboration?

Follow up: Is collaborating with your team important to you? Why?

Notes:

Question: Do you prefer to work alone or with others? Explain.

Notes:

MASCULINITY VERSUS FEMININITY

Question: What would you say are the critical characteristics of educators who participate effectively in a CPT context?

Follow up: What characteristics are ineffective?

Notes:

Question: How assertive and energetic must a teacher be in CPTs in order for the group to work together effectively?

Follow up: Can you tell me about an experience you have had collaborating with teachers who are overly or underly assertive and/or energetic? Was the experience helpful for the group?

Notes:

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE INDEX

Question: How open is your CPT to exploring new ideas and implementing changes?

Follow up: Do you see any differences among the members?

Notes:

Question: What emotions do you experience when you are confronted with change?

Follow-up: The school has experienced quite a few changes in the past two years. Tell me about how you have adapted to those changes.

Notes:

LONG TERM ORIENTATION OR SHORT TERM ORIENTATION

Question: Does your CPT tend to focus more on short term or long-term goals?

Follow up: Are you comfortable with that?

Follow up: Where do you think the balance should be?

Follow up: What goals have you been working on this year?

Follow up: What is the timeline you are looking at for implementation/realization?

Notes:

Question: What value do you place on traditional teaching methods, such as rote exercises and memorization?

Notes:

Question: What value do you place on learning new methods of teaching, such as inquiry based learning or conceptual planning?

Notes:

INDULGENCE VERSUS RESTRAINT

Question: What value do you place on providing feedback to colleagues in your CPT?

Follow up: Describe your comfort level of providing feedback to colleagues.

Follow up: Describe your comfort level of providing feedback to your CPT leader.

Question: Describe your comfort level when presenting your opinion in your CPT.

Notes:

Question: Explain your responsibilities to work that must be completed during holiday breaks.

Follow up:

Notes:

Closing: That is the end of my questions. I truly appreciate your perspective and insight. Do you have any questions for me or is there anything else you would like to share?

I will be in touch with you as soon as the interview is transcribed so you can confirm its accuracy. Remember that your identity will be kept completely confidential and you may opt out of the study at any time. Thank you again.

Appendix C

PLC Observation Protocol

Team Name:

Date:

Location:

Time:

Observer:

Observed Characteristics of CPTs:

- Shared Mission (Purpose), Vision (Clear Direction), Values (Collective Commitments) and Goals (Indicators, Timelines, Targets) _____
- Collaborative Culture with a Focus on Learning _____
- Collective Inquiry into Best Practice and Current Reality _____
- Action Orientation: Learning by Doing _____
- Commitment to Continuous Improvement _____
- Results Orientation _____
- Supportive and Shared Leadership _____

Observed Activity Log	
Description	Interpretation

Appendix D

Culture Compass© Results: The United States Versus Canada

Cultural Dimension	Country Comparison	Personal Feedback
Power Distance Index	No significant difference; Inequalities should be minimized; hierarchy for convenience only.	<p>- You may either get the feeling that your colleagues do whatever the superior wants them to do to an extent that you wonder whether their personal life still matters to them and you therefore may get worried that this is also being expected from you or you observe silent resistance.</p> <p>- Appearances may confuse you as it is so hard to know who among your colleagues has more and who has less authority.</p>
Individualism/Collectivism	Like the US, Canada is highly individualistic; people look after themselves and their immediate families; offense causes guilt and a loss of self-esteem.	<p>- Criticizing individuals in public may not be appreciated; do it privately in an indirect way so they don't feel they lose face.</p> <p>- In-group members may be fully trusted; there may be mistrust towards people outside the group. If teams members are from different "in-groups", trust and relationships may need to be developed.</p>
Masculinity/Femininity	Canada has a bit of both worlds, with no clear dominant cultural value; Decisions may be made through reaching consensus; this takes a lot of meetings and time, but after consensus has been reached, the implementation will take	<p>- You may get worried that in case of disagreement parties concerned have a tendency to start polarizing instead of looking for a mutual solution.</p> <p>-You may get frightened that you may be drawn into conflicts between colleagues.</p>

place quickly; The US falls closer to a Masculine society. Some among them appear to enjoy conflicting situations.

Culture Compass© Results: The United States Versus Canada (continued)

Uncertainty Avoidance Index	No significant difference.	- You may get demotivated as so much is left hanging in the air, creating a lot of ambiguity in the work situation.
		-You may get demotivated by your boss who appears not to be all that knowledgeable and you may be surprised that this doesn't affect your direct colleagues negatively.
Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation	Both cultures are more normative than pragmatic; Canada is more Long-Term oriented; strong concern for absolute truth; People may be more willing to compromise if they feel respected; it is not about right or wrong, but about a good relationship.	- You may get upset about the short-term perspective with which your colleagues go about their business. They too easily seem to give up if they are not successful in the short run.
		- You may get upset by the boastful and gloating manner colleagues profile themselves and/or their own country, without showing any humility.
Indulgence/Restraint	No significant difference; exhibit a willingness to realize their impulses and desires; tendency towards optimism	- Colleagues may place a higher degree of importance on leisure time and spend money as they wish.

From: (Hofstede Insights, personal communication, January 30, 2020)

Appendix E

Culture Compass© Results: The United States Versus France

Cultural Dimension	Country Comparison	Personal Feedback
Power Distance Index	France accepts a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. Hierarchy is seen as reflecting inherent inequalities; People are likely to take less initiative; they will only act upon the mandate of their direct superior; Don't expect a free flow of information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You may take too much initiative in the eyes of your colleagues, which may create resentment. - You may underestimate how important it is to have a good relationship with your superior, yet you have to ensure that such a relationship will not create envy among your colleagues.
Individualism/Collectivism	Both countries are highly Individualistic; people are expected to look after themselves and their immediate families; strong belief in the ideal of self-actualization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You may get upset by the fact that so much nepotism is taking place. - You may get the impression that your colleagues are more easily promoted than you, although you are more knowledgeable and you are doing therefore a much better job.
Masculinity/Femininity	France is a moderately feminine society; Conflicts can be threatening, because they endanger the well-being of everyone; they are resolved by compromise and negotiation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You may get worried that in case of disagreement parties concerned have a tendency to start polarizing instead of looking for a mutual solution. -You may get upset by the fact that bosses are rarely decisive. Instead everybody is busy participating in meetings to come to a conclusion, which they may change later anyway.

Culture Compass© Results: The United States Versus France (continued)

Uncertainty Avoidance Index	France scores very high; members seek mechanisms to avoid ambiguity; people do not readily accept change; emotional need for strict rules, laws, policies, and regulations.	<p>- You may get bewildered by all the rules you are directly or indirectly told to follow, irrespective whether these are formal or informal rules and irrespective whether people are really complying with these rules or not.</p> <p>- Your colleagues may think you are wasting resources by spending a considerable amount of time to prepare yourself well.</p>
Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation	France exhibits a more pragmatic culture than US; truth depends very much on the situation, context, and time	<p>- Don't ask 'why' too often, the focus is on what and how.</p> <p>- Focus will be put on long-term results.</p> <p>- You may get upset about the short-term perspective.</p>
Indulgence/Restraint	France is a more restrained culture than US, though no clear preference between the two dimensions; Your local colleagues may not be very open to foreigners in general	<p>- Colleagues may be less eager to go out for after work drinks.</p> <p>- Communication can be restricted to the minimum necessary.</p>

From: (Hofstede Insights, personal communication, January 30, 2020)

Appendix F

Culture Compass© Results: The United States versus Poland

Cultural Dimension	Country Comparison	Personal Feedback
Power Distance Index	Poland scores much higher on PDI; accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place; Status symbols of power are very important to indicate social position and “communicate” the respect that should be shown.	<p>- You may either get the feeling that your colleagues do whatever the superior wants them to do to an extent that you wonder whether their personal life still matters to them and you therefore may get worried that this is also being expected from you or you observe silent resistance.</p> <p>- People are likely to take less initiative; they will only act upon the mandate of their direct superior.</p> <p>- Don't expect a free flow of information.</p>
Individualism/Collectivism	Poland is a relatively individualist society; US is extremely high; people look after themselves and their immediate families; offense causes guilt and a loss of self-esteem.	<p>- When making mistakes people may lose face, having damaged the group's standing.</p> <p>- People may tell you what you want to hear in order to perpetuate harmony and face; double-check information by asking questions that the other party is not able to answer with yes/no.</p>
Masculinity/Femininity	No significant difference; reflecting the presence of slightly more masculine than	- You may get worried that in case of disagreement parties concerned have a tendency to

	feminine elements, making it more success-oriented and driven; Behavior in school, work, and play are based on the shared values; Conflicts are resolved at the individual level by fighting them out, and the goal is to win.	start polarizing instead of looking for a mutual solution. - You may get surprised and annoyed by the degree to which people oversell themselves, either implicitly or explicitly.
--	--	---

Culture Compass© Results: The United States versus Poland (continued)

Uncertainty Avoidance Index	Poland scores very high, demonstrating that as a nation they seek mechanisms to avoid ambiguity; People do not readily accept change; They maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas; emotional need for strict rules, laws, policies, and regulations.	- People expect punctuality. - Don't expect new ideas, ways or methods to be readily appreciated; provide details to help foster confidence in them. - Communication is "sender-oriented" - the receiver should try to understand what the expert is saying about the subject.
Long-Term/Short-Term Orientation	Polish culture scores higher; strong concern with establishing an absolute truth; great respect for traditions.	- You may wonder how your colleagues have been still so successful while lacking a pragmatic attitude to life. - There may be a focus on longer-term results. - People may be more willing to compromise if they feel respected; it is not about right or wrong, but about a good relationship.
Indulgence/Restraint	Poland has a culture of restraint; tendency toward cynicism and pessimism; no emphasis on leisure time and control desires.	- Communication can be restricted to the minimum necessary. - Gender roles are more strictly prescribed

From: (Hofstede Insights, personal communication, January 30, 2020)

