

Professional Learning Communities: Exploring Burnout by Examining Teacher Collaboration

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Abstract

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have been introduced to support teachers and ultimately impact student outcomes. This study examined the influence of PLCs on teacher burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment), while additionally investigating if there are significant differences based on teacher experience (i.e., novice vs. veteran). With this knowledge, school psychologists will be better equipped to understand the complexities of teacher burnout, while developing effective support strategies to assist teachers.

Literature Review

- Burnout is more frequent in teaching than any other social occupation (Gavish & Friedman, 2010).
- Approximately fifty-percent of teachers will leave the field within their first five years (Ingersoll, 2003).
- “Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work with people in some capacity” (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996, p. 4).
- Gavish and Friedman (2010) report that a lack of collaborative support from colleagues is predictive of teacher burnout within the first year.
- PLCs look to restore morale by reminding teachers of their purpose within the school and creating conditions that allow them to do so (DuFour et al., 2010).
- A PLC determines what skills and knowledge every student should acquire as a result of instruction, how to assess this, and how to respond when students do not learn or are already proficient (DuFour et al., 2010).
- Rigelman and Ruben (2012) found that the participation in a PLC led to a stronger commitment to students and a more self-reflective teaching practice.
- A PLC is also shown to positively affect teacher self-efficacy (Lee, Zhang, & Yin, 2011). Brown (2012) reports that self-efficacy is an important factor in mitigating teacher burnout. Therefore, burnout may be reduced in settings that promote teacher efficacy.

Addresses Consultation and Collaboration and School-Wide Practices to Promote Learning of the NASP Practice Model

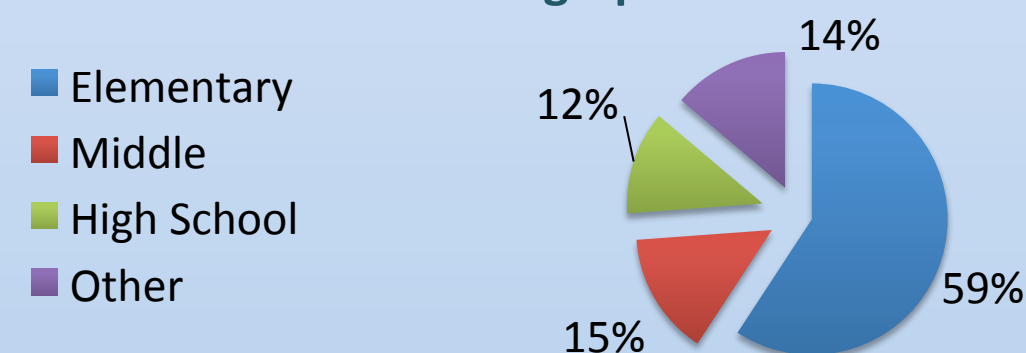
Method

- 570 teachers from schools in the Midwest were surveyed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) – Educators Survey (Maslach et al., 1996), in addition to a survey that examined critical issues for team consideration in order to assess PLC status (DuFour et al., 2010).

Scale	Mean	SD	Min	Max	α
PLC	6.35	2.01	2.00	10.00	.96
MBI - EE	3.47	1.40	1.11	6.89	.92
MBI - PA	6.01	0.73	3.00	7.00	.67
MBI - DP	1.89	0.88	1.00	4.80	.60

- 119 teachers responded to the survey for a response rate of approximately 21%. A majority of respondents were Caucasian and female.
- While researchers had anticipated to include teacher experience as a variable, an attempt to determine an adequate identification of novice and experienced teachers was not supported by the sample size.

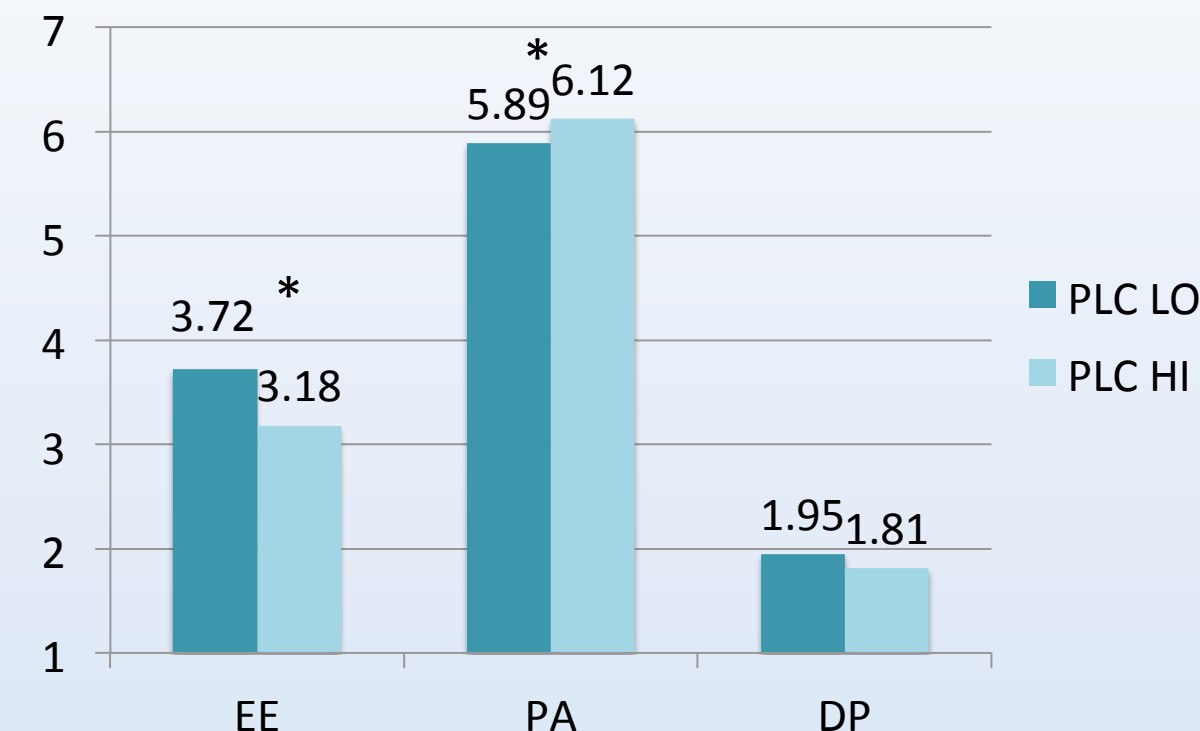
Teacher Demographics



Results

- A median split was performed to create the Independent Variable of PLC Status (High PLC Functioning vs. Low PLC Functioning).
- The dependent variables included emotional exhaustion (EE), depersonalization (DP), and personal accomplishment (PA).
- Researchers conducted three separate 1-tailed independent samples t-tests with the following results:
 EE, $t(118) = 2.17, p = .02$
 PA, $t(118) = -1.73, p = .04$
 DP, $t(118) = .86, p = .39$

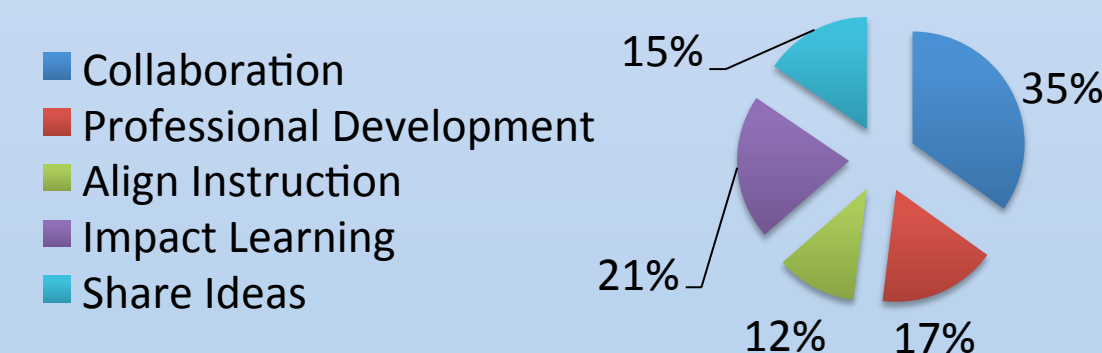
PLC Status and Burnout



Qualitative Analysis

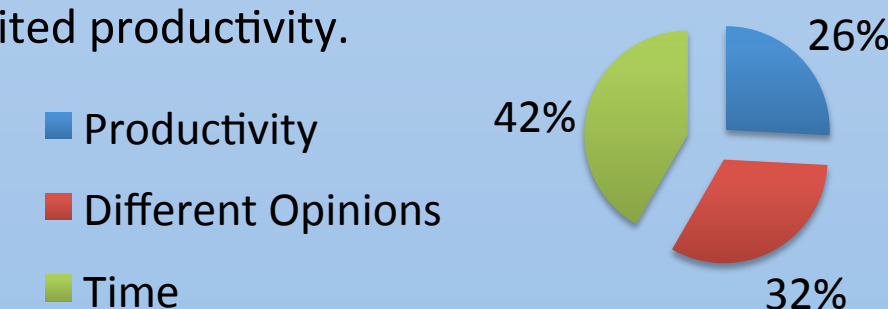
Q1: How have Professional Learning Communities supported your role as a teacher?

- 35% of teachers noted increased support through collaboration with colleagues (n=45).
- Other teachers reported that PLCs help to clarify what students need, allow time to align instruction with the curriculum, and provide a professional space to learn from one another.
- “They have provided time to think about what is best for kids. That is the reason I got into teaching and it is nice to be able to have time for that again.”



Q2: What are the challenges of being involved in a Professional Learning Community?

- 42% noted time was the biggest barrier (n=43).
- 32% referenced differing opinions or personalities and viewpoints towards the PLC process (n=39).
- Other responses included a lack of structure and limited productivity.



Discussion

- High PLC Status resulted in lower levels of Emotional Exhaustion and a higher sense of Personal Accomplishment in teachers. PLC Status did not have a significant impact on Depersonalization.
- Qualitative responses suggested that teachers believe time is the greatest barrier impacting PLCs. Additionally, responses indicated that further training and guidance would be beneficial to promote direction and clarity.
- The implementation of PLCs within the schools surveyed varied significantly. This is a variable that should be examined in future research.

Limitations

- Although researchers had hoped to examine years of experience, the sample size did not permit.

Implications for School Psychologists

- Teacher burnout has significant implications, including both financial ramifications and negative effects on staff and student outcomes.
- An understanding of the factors influencing burnout will help us to further understand how to prevent such within our schools and develop effective supports.
- School psychologists are uniquely qualified to promote and facilitate the growth of high-functioning PLCs in order to foster student achievement.

References

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