

The Role of School Learning Communities in Building a Continuous Learning Culture and Increasing Teacher Professionalism

Yuli Kurniyawati*, Suwito Eko Pramono, Sugi Sugi

Post Graduate School, Universitas Negeri Semarang, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: yuli.k.temanggung@gmail.com

Abstract. Global demands and developments in science and technology have an impact on various sectors. Educational institutions also need to be supported by teachers who have 21st-century competencies and skills. One of the competencies that supports improving the quality of learning is professional competency. The ineffectiveness of learning communities in schools so far, of course, has an impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of achieving school goals. This paper aims to describe the role of school learning communities in building a culture of continuous learning and increasing teacher professionalism. The method used is an exploratory study that combines findings from various relevant sources complemented by interviews and direct observations in schools implementing the independent curriculum. The research results show that: (1) the school learning community is a forum that encourages teachers to collaborate, share good practices, and cultivate a culture of continuous learning. (2) The school learning community learns together and shares good practices with cycles of initial reflection, planning, implementation, and evaluation. (3) The learning cycle in the school learning community ensures that learning outcomes are implemented in learning, there is continuous improvement in learning so that professionalism increases.

Keywords: school learning community, continuous learning culture, teacher professionalism

INTRODUCTION

The world of education is experiencing development and change along with the developments and demands of the times. The curriculum is an important part in determining educational development. The curriculum in Indonesia has undergone changes from time to time, starting in 1947 until the most recent independence curriculum. The aim of curriculum changes is to improve the previous curriculum. This curriculum change is a challenge for schools, teachers and students because these three subjects play an active role in implementing the learning process. According to (Indratta et al., 2022), to face various challenges, strategic efforts are needed by understanding the various roles of each educational element or subject.

Teachers are important actors who support the creation of quality learning. Hargreaves (2019) stated that world conditions are increasingly developing, requiring teachers to continue to develop skills and improve their professionalism. Meanwhile Schleicher (2018) states that the key elements of teaching today are collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving. These elements are hereinafter referred to as 21st century skills. Several studies examine how teachers learn and what professional development is most effective (Katz and Dack, 2014; Johannesson, 2022; Kennedy, 2016)

Learning communities have been known for

some time. A learning community is a group of people who have the same learning goals and participate and interact with each other in the learning process to achieve these goals (Chapman, Ramondt, & Smiley, 2006). Shirley Wear it (1997) is an expert on educational change and was the first to combine the terms professional, learning, and community into one. It defines a learning community as a collective effort by teachers to improve learning practices, taking collective responsibility for applying what they discover. Temporary Wear it & Sommers, 2008 states a learning community as a team of teachers who are committed to meeting regularly, collaborating, interacting and supporting each other to improve teaching.

Professional learning community (PLC) has its own dimensions and characteristics. Garet et al. (2001) found that important features of professional development in order to increase knowledge and skills are a focus on content knowledge, active learning, greater time span, collective participation, and coherence with other learning experiences. Meanwhile Blitz & Schulman, (2016); Garcia *et al.*, (2018) states that the dimensions of PLC are collaboration, clear shared goals, focus on learning, school culture or climate, sharing good practices, reflective dialogue.

Many studies have been conducted regarding

teacher professional development. Johannesson, (2022) and Kennedy, (2016) stated that teacher professional development and professional learning communities are one of the factors that support improving teaching practices and transforming student learning. Meanwhile, Brennan & King (2022) state that professional development communities can support teachers to develop and maintain inclusive practices in the long term. Similar research by Widayati et al., (2021) states that teachers have an interest and capacity in continuous professional development. However, teachers need support to develop professionalism through ecosystem and macrosystem factors.

There are several factors that serve as benchmarks for not optimal PLC activities, including teachers' lack of understanding regarding continuous professional development (PKB), low teacher participation in PLC. The main problem is that PLC activities have not been carried out in a sustainable manner Schaap & de Bruijn (2018). The same thing was conveyed by Komariah, A. et al (2018) that teachers did not provide their abilities optimally to empower PLCs, which had an impact on low contributions to sustainable professional development.

In Indonesia, there are various professional learning communities such as subject teacher deliberations (MGMP), teacher working groups (KKG), teacher mobilization communities, and literacy warriors. Members of the learning community usually consist of teachers from across educational units. PeMuch research has been carried out regarding inter-school learning communities. Like research (Khusna & Priyanti, 2023), (Wardiana, 2023) which concluded that teacher participation in inter-school learning communities or online learning communities has an impact on teacher professionalism or competence in carrying out teaching duties.

On the other hand, the learning community in schools has not been running routinely and has not been effective. As the independent curriculum is implemented, the school learning community is starting to be encouraged to grow and play a role. School learning communities emerged in the context of efforts to improve learning services. The research background is an important guide for the author in conducting his research. The aim of this research is to find out and describe the role of the school learning community in building a culture of continuous learning and increasing teacher professionalism.

METHODS

The method used is an exploratory study that combines findings from various relevant sources complemented by interviews and direct observations in schools implementing the independent curriculum. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Ngadirejo, which is a class 3 drive school. The research was conducted November 2023 – February 2024. Data and information were obtained from literature studies and combined with direct observation and interviews. The author searches and analyzes various relevant sources such as scientific journals, books and articles. Interviews were conducted with the principal and 5 teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Ngadirejo. Direct observations were carried out 3 times regarding the implementation of school learning community activities.

The methods of literature study, interviews and observation allow the author to present a comprehensive analysis of the role of school learning communities in building a culture of continuous learning and increasing teacher professionalism. This research implements the Miles & Huberman qualitative data analysis model in Sugiyono (2017) with data collection stages, namely: data collection, data reduction, data presentation and conclusions. The data collected is in the form of observations, interviews and documents. Next, the data is analyzed and presented in the form of a descriptive explanation. The collected data was then rechecked using data triangulation to increase the reliability and validity of the data (Vidovich, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, data was obtained from interviews with the school principal, 5 teachers, and 3 observations of the implementation of school learning community activities. The data obtained relates to the stages of learning community formation, the learning cycle of school learning communities as well as the role of the school learning community in building a culture of continuous learning and increasing teacher professionalism.

Based on the data above, information was obtained that the learning community at SMP Negeri 1 Ngadirejo was formed with a series of steps starting from planning, organizing, implementing and supervising. The planning stage

Table 1. Interview data on steps in forming a school learning community

No	Stages of Formation	Step by step	Additional Notes
1	Planning	Planning begins with forming a small team, determining the goals and name of the learning community, determining the implementation time and socializing the program	The small team discusses to plan goals, implementation time and objectives before socializing it to all teachers
2	Organizing	This is done by preparing an organizational structure based on mapping existing human resources and then issuing a Principal's Decree	Based on the concept of small team activities, the school principal maps resources for subsequent issuance of a decree.
3	Implementation	The school learning community is held every Thursday at the beginning and end of the month. The material discussed is in accordance with the analysis of teacher learning needs including positive discipline, educational report cards, performance, differentiated learning, learning reflection and sharing good practices	The material discussed is in accordance with the teacher's needs and follow-up reflection. Learning communities can minimize competency disparities between teachers. Teachers have the same opportunity to learn, teachers who have good practices or gain new learning experiences can be shared with community members.
4	Supervision	Supervision, evaluation and monitoring are carried out by the school principal in order to determine the achievement of the goals that have been set	Supervision plays a major role in ensuring the continuity of the learning community in accordance with the stated objectives

Data source: Interview 2024

begins with forming a small team, determining the goals and name of the learning community, determining the implementation time and socialization of the program. The organizing stage is carried out by preparing an organizational structure based on mapping existing human resources and then issuing a Principal's Decree. The school learning community is held every Thursday at the beginning and end of the month. The material discussed is in accordance with the analysis of teacher learning needs including positive discipline, educational report cards, performance, differentiated learning, learning reflection and sharing good practices. Supervision, evaluation and monitoring are carried out by the school principal in order to determine the achievement of the goals that have been set.

The results of the interview explained that the steps for forming a learning community at school include 4 steps, namely planning, organizing, implementing and supervising. Supervision is an important step to ensure the sustainability of the learning community and to find out whether it is running in accordance with the stated objectives. This is in accordance with the results of research by Schaap & de Bruijn (2018) which states that the

main problem is that PLC activities have not been implemented in a sustainable manner.

Based on the results of interviews and observations during two implementations of learning community activities, information was obtained that the learning cycle of the school learning community at Ngadirejo Middle School includes initial reflection, planning, implementation, evaluation and returning to reflection again. Cycles in learning communities ensure that learning outcomes in the community are implemented in learning. Reflections on the implementation of learning become material for discussion within the community so that continuous learning improvements can occur. Data from observations and interviews are as follows:

Based on the data above, information is obtained that the existence of a learning community is very important. Learning communities are a forum for teachers to learn together, collaborate and realize that education in schools is a shared responsibility. Learning communities can minimize competency disparities between teachers. Teachers have the same opportunity to learn, teachers who have good practices or gain new learning experiences can be

Table 2. Data from interviews and observations of the learning community cycle

No	Learning community cycle	What is done each cycle	Additional Notes
1	Initial reflections	Teachers discuss and analyze student learning outcomes, reflect and determine the agenda of topics to be discussed	Reflection data comes from assessment results and learning notes.
2	Planning	Teachers develop learning plans or review existing plans	At this stage teachers can learn together, collaborate and realize that education in schools is a shared responsibility. Teachers have the same opportunity to learn, teachers who have good practices or gain new learning experiences can be shared with community members
3	Implementation	Teachers implement plans that have been prepared together in their respective classes	The results of learning in the community can be immediately put into practice in each class
4	Evaluation	The teacher discusses the results of the learning that has been implemented	Evaluation in order to provide the best learning for student learning
5	Back to reflection again	The teacher reflects on what has been effective and what is less effective and needs to be improved further	The learning cycle really encourages teachers to always learn and make efforts to improve learning

Data source: Observations and interviews 2024

shared with community members. In this way, the results of learning in the community can be immediately put into practice in their respective classes. The learning cycle carried out is a continuous process starting from reflection, planning, implementation, evaluation and returning to reflection again, really encouraging teachers to always learn and make efforts to improve learning. These results are in line with research by Brandenburg (2023), Titihalawa, S (2023) which states that learning communities have an influence on increasing teacher pedagogical and professional competence.

School learning communities play an important role in building a learning culture and teacher professionalism where knowledge, experience and good practices are shared. Even the results of teacher interviews stated that the learning outcomes in the learning community were directly put into practice in learning. There is a strong motivation to carry out and feels embarrassed if he does not follow the progress of his colleagues. This is in line with Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory where the learning

process in a school learning community can increase teacher self-efficacy by providing space for learning, improving new skills and building self-confidence.

The learning structure that is attached to routine activities at school according to an agreed schedule is a special characteristic of the school learning community. Learning activities and culture in educational units become more meaningful with collaboration, a sense of mutual dependence on each other and mutual sharing. This series of learning processes is carried out in a continuous learning cycle in an effort to improve learning and increase teacher professionalism. This is in line with research Rahayuningsih, S (2023) that the process of forming and optimizing Learning Communities in schools is an effort to increase teacher competence and learning culture in schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it was found that the existence of a learning community is very

important. The role of the school learning community in building a culture of continuous learning and increasing teacher professionalism includes: (1) the school learning community is a forum that encourages teachers to collaborate, share good practices, and cultivate a culture of continuous learning. (2) The school learning community learns together and shares good practices with a cycle of initial reflection, planning, implementation, evaluation, and returning to reflection again. (3) The learning cycle in the school learning community ensures that learning outcomes are implemented in learning, there is continuous improvement in learning so that professionalism increases.

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