

an oTPD opportunity. The oTPD catalyst can be anyone (e.g. school administrators, teachers, colleagues) who is willing to share TPD or oTPD information that teachers can look into. This is why social networking is important. The network of like-minded people can share oTPD events that can be beneficial for EFL teachers.

3. Core and structural features of the oTPD (Appendix 1 and 2): This is the heart of the entire process as it determines the how, where, when the oTPD will take place, why it is being offered, who the people participating are, and what the content focus of the oTPD is about. The major planning revolves around this area. The core features include a) content focus, b) active learning, and c) coherence. Content focus refers to the activity or activities that focus on improving teachers' skills and knowledge of the subject content that students will be learning (Ganser, 2000). Active learning, as opposed to passive learning, refers to the active engagement of teachers in the activity, i.e. meaningful discussion, planning, and practice (class observations either observing experts or being observed) (Borko, 2004). Coherence relates to "the degree to which the activity promotes coherence in teachers' professional development, by incorporating experiences which are consistent with teachers' goals" (Garet, et al., 2001, p. 920). If the professional development activity that they participate in is coherent with their other professional development activities that they have engaged in the past, they are more likely to change their practice.

The core features highlighted in this study provided the teachers with the support that they needed in gaining

professional development that they could actually put into practice, thus achieving a meaningful effect on teacher learning. The analyses of messages in both environments provided evidence that the nature of discussions involved the use of cognitive skills. The implementation of cognitive apprenticeship and mentoring theory into practice (which ensured that active learning was taking place) was critical since it underlies one of the core features of this oTPD (Appendix 2).

Structural features involved a) the form of oTPD, b) duration, and c) collective participation. Form refers to what type of activity is being conducted such as traditional forms like workshops, course, and conferences; other forms are reform types such as study groups, mentoring, and coaching. Duration pertains to the length of the activity i.e., hours, days, weeks, etc. It also refers to the time which the participants spent in the activity. Collective participation or the participation of other teachers is a potential form of teacher learning since it provides opportunities for meaningful interaction (Clement & Vanderberghe, 2001). After finding out what particular topic the teachers want to discuss or learn more about, searching for suitable mentors or experts who would be willing to share their expertise is the next step. Posting a call for volunteer mentors to various PLNs and CoP (e.g., Webheads), similar to what I did in this study, is one solution in looking for experts or experienced teachers who can serve as mentors. This is also the time to plan for a suitable timeframe for the oTPD, taking into account the availability of

where the oTPD will take place should also be in place around this time. Choosing the online platform will depend on the type of oTPD, whether it involves asynchronous discussions, synchronous webinars, or both. This study strongly suggests that opportunities for teacher reflections should be incorporated into the oTPD process. In this way, the teachers will have the chance to review and reflect on their oTPD journey. The use of blogs for reflective purposes is a great way to achieve this; and as seen in this study, mentors can also make use of the blogs to leave comments or feedback, thus making the mentor-mentee connections even stronger.

4. Change in Teachers' Attitude and Practice: Finding out what the teachers learned from the webinars or asynchronous discussions can be done by looking at recording or chat archives. The quality of the interactions with the experts/mentors can say a lot about the communication dynamics that took place. Did the teachers ask questions? How engaged were they in the conversations? Did the mentors provide scaffolding or mentoring? The high level of social interactions that took place in this study allowed the construction of new knowledge (various concepts and skills in EFL pedagogy). Change in practice becomes evident when teachers carry out the suggestions and/or ideas given by the expert teachers, and normally entails doing something that was never done before. The change in attitude and behavioral cues manifested in Joy's and Cindy's practices are available in Appendix 3 and 4.

effective professional development in online environments can be implemented without incurring the high cost involved in traditional TPD. This framework also shows that informal oTPD can still be implemented following an organized and structured design.

FINDINGS

The Taiwanese teachers in this study had little opportunity to engage in a personalized TPD, thus the use of online technology enabled collaboration at a distance. The oTPD allowed them to experience an informal mentoring relationship among expert EFL/ESL teachers which includes the transfer of knowledge related to the teaching skills or strategies relevant to their own teaching contexts. While the focused areas were on mentoring, learning, sharing, etc., the entire social interaction (with the teacher-experts) involved the development of cognitive skills as they participated in an authentic learning experience. The conversations between the experts and the Taiwanese EFL teachers also demonstrated that collegial relationships can be fostered based on trust and respect. Exchanges of messages showed that efforts were made to collaborate with each other while engaging in consultation and sharing problems and solutions, which in the end helped the Taiwanese EFL teachers make sense of their teaching practices as they gave/received feedback. Due to length restrictions, I only provide a few excerpts of discourse

from selected mentors that highlighted examples of cognitive apprenticeship².

Modeling

With the modeling method, learners are given opportunities to observe how experts go through the process of problem solving. The experts model a certain process by talking about it and explaining the strategies and reasons for doing so (Wang & Bonk, 2001). An example of modeling was when Elizabeth posted a message to the Yahoo! Group answering April's (one of the active Taiwanese teachers on YG) call for some teaching strategies that would make her elementary students participate and be interested in the class better. In her message, she gave April a concrete example of a learning activity called the "Name Game". By weaving previous comments made in the YG discussion list, Elizabeth shows she was not only following the messages that were posted by the Taiwanese teachers, but it also affirmed her support and understanding of the teachers' context and needs. She focused on students' learning motivation as this was what most of the teachers raised as an important issue for them. She also gave clarifications on the concepts that she mentioned. For example, she gave a simple and easily understandable definition of how "extrinsic motivation" can be done in class and a description of what the activity was about and why it was being suggested in the first place. Elizabeth wrote how the Name Game activity could be applied in the classroom and the

² For full report of findings and analysis, please refer to the longitudinal empirical research project (Yeh, 2011) that includes data triangulation from interviews and two survey questionnaires which also looked into the

process in which the students participate (Figure 2). By sharing her personal experiences (what worked and what did not) embedded in the learning activity that she was suggesting, she also shows her expertise and credibility. Such a form of sharing could also inspire teachers to adopt this activity in their own classroom. She also introduced the idea of pairing up students to get them to practice oral skills, and she also gave suggestions on how to use this activity to low level students.

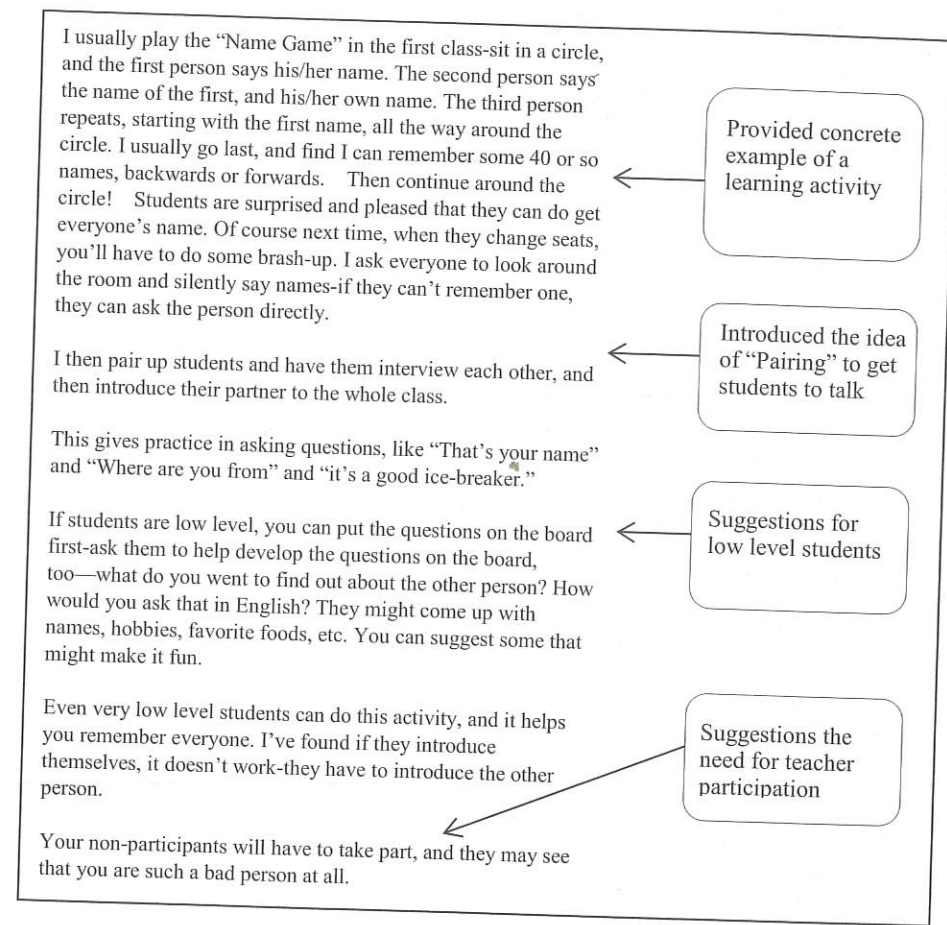


Figure 2: Suggested activity for EFL class

April posted a message to the group where she gave an update of her class (Figure 3). She said that she tried the learning activity that Elizabeth suggested with some improvements to suit her students better. She had prepared hand-outs with interview questions for the pair-up activity, and she also added a song and a puzzle activity. She mentioned that those students who once did not participate in class activities were participating in this one. In the end, she reckoned the class went smoothly, and that it had a positive effect on how the students treated her during their second class meeting. Seeing the change in behaviour of her students had affected her perception about herself as an effective teacher; this experience had given her the confidence that she badly needed. By posting this message to the group, April affirmed her active participation in her professional development. Reporting back to the group allowed others, including the guest teacher-experts, to know how their participation in April's teacher professional development proved helpful. It also informed the group about the progress that she had accomplished.

The activity turned out to be a success since her students who previously did not engage in class activities started to participate and enjoyed the activity. April saw the changes in the way her students behaved in the class meeting that followed. This experience had positive ramifications for her attitude towards teaching and her own perception of herself as a teacher.

Figure 4 below shows the types of before-and-after attitude and behaviour that April expressed in her messages posted to the Taiwanese EFL YG soliciting advice regarding her dilemma.

I am not such a bad person!

Sat. Mar 5, 2009 1:50 pm

I took Elizabeth's suggestion to play the "Name game" in the first class in order to make the class enjoyable the I paired up them introduce each other. (I gave each of them a piece of paper. There were many questions on it and they must ask their partners) then we discussed together. I also taught them a song and did the pizza game. Finally the non-participants took part in the activity so the whole class went smoothly! In the second class this week, they tried to get used to me including my teaching method and didn't argue me again. Now I have more confidence in my teaching and I know "I am not such a bad person!"

- Implementing own activity
- Effect on student motivation
- Enhancing teacher's confidence