Effects of Community of Practice on College English Teacher Professional Development: Case Study of English Teaching of Featured Chinese Culture Faculty Development

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Abstract

Teacher professional development plays an important role in improving teaching efficiency and upgrading talents cultivation, while community of practice is an effective platform for teacher professional development. To explore a feasible approach to its faculty professional development, English Teaching of Featured Chinese Culture, a college English intercultural communication course, adopted Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle Theory to construct and operate communities of practice on teaching and researching projects, aiming to encourage "mutual engagement", "joint enterprise" and "shared repertoire". The follow-up case studies with teacher professional development outcomes, reflective journals, and interviews revealed that communities of practice exerted different but positive effects on the professional development of its faculty members in the aspects of conducting teaching reflections, renovating teaching practices, and implementing teaching researches, the findings of which were expected to shed some light on teacher professional development practices.

Keywords: college English, English Teaching of Featured Chinese Culture, Experiential Learning Cycle Theory, community of practice, teacher professional development, case analysis

1. Introduction

To guide the implementation practices of teaching reforms and education innovations in the new era, China Education Modernization 2035 was promulgated in 2019, advocating the constructions of high-quality teacher professional development systems, enhancing the integration between pre-service teacher professional training and post-service teacher professional development, and sustaining teachers' life-long autonomous learning and development. To deepen education reforms, China further proposed the developments of new engineering science, new medical science, new agriculture science and new liberal science (collectively called the four new sciences) to improve the education service abilities and contribution capacities of higher education. The new liberal science construction aimed to cultivate qualified talents who know China, love China, and shoulder great responsibilities for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Wu, 2021).

The higher education modernization drive and the new liberal science construction are the development tendencies of modern education in China. College English, taught to students of non-English majors, is the key curriculum in higher education and an important component in the new liberal science, whose education reforms and teaching innovations call for college English teachers to undertake immense knowledge structure adjustments and profound teaching ability developments so as to comply with the new development tendencies, to satisfy the demands for education reforms, and to improve teacher professional developments in the aspects of discipline theory, course teaching, scientific researching, and information application (National Foreign Languages Teaching Advisory Board under the Ministry of Education, 2020).

Obviously, college English teacher professional development is of great significance in the current education reforms and innovations. But the reality of college English teacher professional development is far from satisfactory. The academic degrees that college English teachers currently hold are much lower than the teachers in other disciplines, most of whom hold Ph. D degrees, which restrict college English teachers' academic research abilities and professional developments (Wang & Wang, 2011). Having been engaged in classroom teaching located on different campuses, college English teachers encounter an isolated teacher culture, failing to have chances for collaborative exchanges and teaching reflections (Xu & Li, 2012). College English teachers'

knowledge and theoretical systems for teaching researches are far from being enough and their teaching practices lack necessary theoretical support (Liu & Lu, 2012). To improve teaching efficiencies and talents cultivation qualities, it deserves further exploring, both theoretically and practically, into feasible and effective ways for college English teacher professional development. As the constructors, practitioners and beneficiaries of communities of practice, the authors of this paper tried to summarize and reflect on the construction experiences of communities of practice and analyze upon the specific effects of communities of practice on the professional development of teachers engaged in English Teaching of Featured Chinese Culture, hoping to provide feasible references for college English teacher professional development.

2. Research Background

To provide a research background and a theoretical framework for the study, the published literatures regarding the term definition, operating platform and theoretical support of college English teacher professional development need to be expounded upon first.

2.1 Definition of College English Teacher Professional Development

Accompanying the deepening teaching reforms ever since the 1980s, the state, society, and school have set increasing expectations of and demands for teacher professional developments (Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education, 2003). Guiding teachers to be enthusiastically devoted to teaching and researching, promoting the systematic interactions between researching and teaching, and enhancing the integrations between teaching researching and innovative talents cultivation have thus become the very important contents to build up high-quality professional teaching faculties who are equipped with noble morality, exquisite expertise, reasonable composition and full vitality (Ministry of Education, 2010).

College English teacher professional development is a systematic engineering, involving both objective elements and subjective factors. It is not easy to give college English teacher professional development a comprehensive definition, but its major contents and striking features could still be obvious. First of all, college English teacher professional development is a changing process, in which "the teacher becomes a member in the teaching profession and grows increasingly mature through teaching practices" (Dunkin, 1989, p. 553). Secondly, college English teacher professional development is a practice-research integrated dynamic progress, in which "the teacher learns in doing, reflects in action, and keeps on practicing and improving" (Wen & Ren, 2012, p. 22). Thirdly, college English teacher professional development is a developing progress, in which "the teacher keeps on enriching professional knowledge, innovating teaching techniques, improving research abilities, and developing professional qualities" (Sun & Gu, 2015, p. 63). In general, college English teacher professional development is a progressive integrations of knowledge and technique, theory and practice, and teaching and researching in the teaching career, whose emphases are particularly laid on cultivating abilities to make decisions and reflections, and to conduct action researches when encountering practice problems to be worked out (Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education, 2003).

College English teacher professional development can have various forms, which can either be in the form of personal endeavors of in-service training, and academic exchanges and degree promotions, or in the way of teaching career planning under the school/department platforms, and teaching and researching integrated communities of practice with expert (senior) teachers' "instruction, assistance and guidance" (National Foreign Languages Teaching Advisory Board under the Ministry of Education, 2020). But restricted by such factors as teaching faculty and school personnel management policies, college English teachers' personal endeavors for professional development, though feasible in theory, are rather difficult in practice. Out of all forms available for college English teacher professional development, community of practice has generally been regarded as an important means and an effective approach (Wen, 2017).

2.2 Platform for College English Teacher Professional Development

The concept of community of practice, or CoP, was first proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991) in Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation, who believed that when green hands obtained the legitimate rights to enter the community of practice, they, by observing, listening, accompanying, doing odds and ends, assisting and trying to learn the profession-related knowledge and skills, would gradually develop from peripheral participation to full participation, growing from green hands to experienced hands. Since the learning under the framework of community of practice was social, collaborative and practical, learners needed to engage themselves in and contribute to the community, promoting the development and practice innovation of the community, and making the community an effective and valuable organization (Wang & Zhang, 2019).

Community of practice constructed ideal supervision mechanisms for its members' effective learning and created

favorable organizational atmospheres and ecologies for its members' growth and development. The successful operation of community of practice relied on "mutual engagement", "shared repertoire" and "joint enterprise". By "mutual engagement" and deep participation in the community, community members managed to establish closer interpersonal relationships and stronger concentrated collaborations to improve and perfect their professional knowledge and skills. In the pursuit of their "joint enterprise", community members mutually negotiated and collaborated to create rich "shared repertoire" (Wenger, 1998).

Community of practice, established by college English teachers with similar teaching experiences, common teaching objectives, and close researching interests was an effective means as well as an important platform that not only motivated community individuals, in their experience exchanges and sharing with others, to gain development incentives and innovation ideas for reflective teaching practices, but also promoted community members to help mutually and learn from each other to realize win-win cooperation (Sun & Gu, 2015). Under the platform of community of practice, individual college English teachers had their respective and unique teaching and researching resources either in professional theory, knowledge, skills and teaching experiences, or in the intellectual forms of education and teaching ideas, teaching approach innovations, and teaching research abilities. These resources could be transformed into new forms of knowledge and abilities through "repertoire sharing", and integrated and restructured into knowledge systems and practical abilities through "mutually engaged" learning and researching activities in working out practice and teaching problems, effectively promoting college English teacher professional development.

2.3 Theoretical Support for College English Teacher Professional Development

Being a developing theory about learning, experiential learning originated from "learning by doing", proposed by John Dewey in Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education (1916), which laid great emphases on the important roles that individual's subjective experiencing played in the whole learning progress. After conducting action researches, Kurt Lewin revealed in Field Theory in Social Sciences (1951) that when learners underwent some kind of experiencing, they formulated abstract concepts and conclusions through process observations and reflections, providing action guidelines for the next phase of new experiencing. Jean Piaget (1970) further believed that learning was an integral unity of experience, perception, cognition and behavior, which could be transformed from "concrete perception to abstract construction" and from "active self-centeredness to reflective internalization".

Developing the experiential learning theories proposed by Dewey, Lewin and Piaget, David Kolb (1984, p. 42) proposed Experiential Learning Cycle in the 1980s, who believed that learning was a successive experiencing and a circulating progress that consisted of four adoptive components of concrete experience, reflective behavior, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.
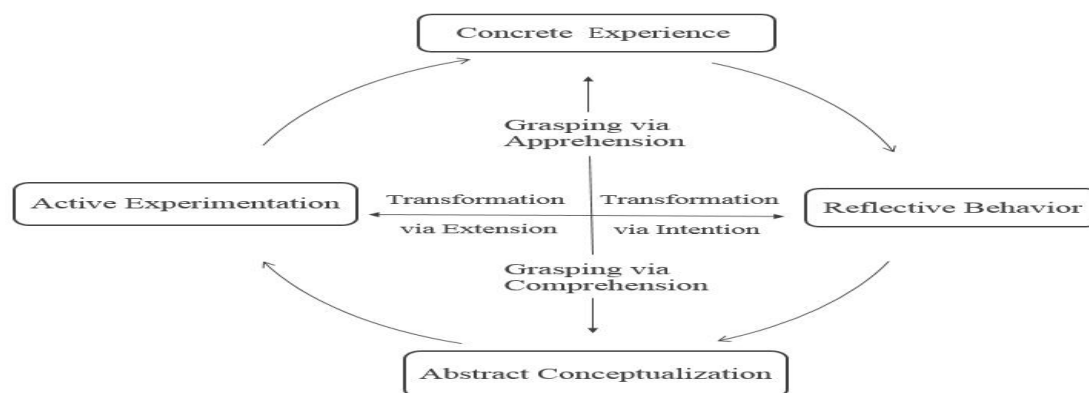
In experiential learning, learners first of all managed to obtain concrete experience through apprehension, and then abstractly conceptualize the direct experiences into such indirect experiences as conceptions or principles. Reflective behavior was a process to narrow down the intension of the knowledge, in which learners inspected the cores of the issue by reflections. Active experimentation was a process to expand the extension of the knowledge, in which learners voluntarily verified the new knowledge obtained in the reflection process. Experiential learning was not just limited to concrete experience, but a successive process that started from concrete experience and kept on rectifying the experiences so as to obtain new concepts. In the process, the emphases were laid both on the circulation of internalization and reflection, or experimentation and verification after experiencing, and on the guidance for learners to reflect and construct learning experiences, making

formulated or generalized conceptions further verified in new situations (Yan, 2009).

Practice reflection and action research are the very important components in college English teacher professional development. Experiential learning provides a theoretical framework for college English teacher professional development. Based on the practice and teaching problems to be worked out to improve teaching efficiencies, college English teachers first of all actively engage in various concrete experiencing practices to find out the practice and teaching problems, then design feasible problem solutions by reflective behaviors, observations and action researches, further verify the effectiveness of problem solutions by active experimentation, and finally formulate conceptions and principles of problem solutions by abstract conceptualization and academic research.

3. Constructing Community of Practice to Promote College English Teacher Professional Development

Community of practice overcame the shortcomings of separation between theory and practice and attached importance to teachers' active status that was usually ignored in the traditional college English teacher training (Liu, 2004), and quite a few researches have already proved the effectiveness of community of practice in promoting college English teacher professional development, Community of practice constructed effective mechanisms for mutual assistance and encouragement to reach development consensus, created favorable ecologies and supporting environments for idea exchanges and mutual sharing of teaching resources, and aroused professional consciousness to reflect on teaching and researching practices (Sun & Gu, 2015; Zhang & Wang, 2021).

English Teaching of Featured Chinese Culture (abbreviated hereafter as the course), a college English intercultural communication course, built up a stable teaching faculty composed of 15 full-time teachers in its endeavor to construct a high-quality blended massive online open course. To promote the professional development of its faculty members, the course made full use of various teaching and researching projects to successfully construct different communities of practice, which followed Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle to encourage its members to conduct "mutual engagement" and "repertoire sharing" in the process of pursuing "joint enterprise".

3.1 Teaching and Researching Project: Running Platform for Community of Practice

Since practice-based teaching and researching projects were very important drives for the sustainable development of college English teaching, the course successfully applied for about 10 series of various teaching and researching projects at different levels to work out specific practice and teaching problems. These teaching and researching projects included constructing blended massive online open course, teaching reforms, textbook compilation, digital resource construction and application, and faculty building and teacher professional development, with each project lasting for about two years.

Community of practice was a professional learning group established with a bond of shared prospects, practical teaching problems, and teacher professional development needs (Zhang & Zhu, 2009), and teaching and researching projects were oriented at working out specific practice and teaching problems in such different aspects as course construction, teaching content expansion, and teaching approach innovation. The teaching faculty of the course constructed those teaching and researching projects into different communities of practice, with each teaching and researching project being established into a community of practice so as to meet the different needs of faculty members for professional development. The communities of practice established on the platforms of these teaching and researching projects not only promoted the concrete operations of the communities, but also created practical experiential learning cycles, enhancing faculty members' professional development in the process of concrete experiencing, reflective observing, abstract conceptualizing, and active experimenting.

3.2 Project Management and Assessment: Operating Mechanism of Community of Practice

Community of practice was generally loose in structure, voluntary in participation and floating in membership (Zhang & Zhu, 2009), but since the communities of practice of the course were established on teaching and researching projects, project management and assessment were accordingly adopted as the operating mechanism for the effective implementation to ensure expected faculty members' professional development outcomes. Each community of practice was generated into a collaborative, practicing and researching project (Alan & Stoller, 2005). When a faculty member applied to participate in the community, he/she was obliged to follow the operation regulations of project management and assessment. With clear-cut division of work and responsibility, each project was managed in the sequence of pre-project planning and designing with shared repertoire, in-project concrete practice and action experimentation, and post-project reflection and conceptualization. The implementation programs and steps were clear, distinct and practical, and the implementation objectives and

goals were concrete, explicit and manageable. To bring into full play the motivating and driving roles that assessing played in enhancing the community member's practice and research integrated consciousness and behaviors, quantitative assessments and qualitative evaluations were applied to assess project outcomes in the form of resource construction, mini lecture/video making, paper publication, and new teaching and researching projects applied or prepared. An integration of formative assessment and summative assessment was also used to examine the community member's progressive participations in the project in accordance with project implementation programs and steps, and evaluate his/her generative outcomes in executing obligations and duties in accordance with project implementation goals.

3.3 Mutual Engagement, Joint Enterprise and Shared Repertoire: Construction Content of Community of Practice

College English teacher professional development was not a blind process to make a cart behind closed doors, but a practicing and developing progress to learn in doing and reflect in acting (Wen & Ren, 2012), and a collaborative process of mutual benefits and encouragements to maximize learning outcomes and realize the shared objectives (Johnson & Johnson, 2004). The concrete and specific construction contents of community of practice played an irreplaceable role in the effective realization of college English professional development. To substantiate the contents of communities of practice, the course made full use of the operating mechanisms to call for mutual engagement and shared repertoire to promote the joint enterprise. The teaching and researching projects constructed "experiential learning" environments and ecologies that managed to drive its faculty members to conduct "shared repertoire" to get encouragement and inspiration. The project management and assessment mechanisms motivated faculty members to be actively and "mutually engaged" in such "active experimentation" practices as mini lecture/video making, teaching resource expansion, teaching approach innovation, teaching assessment optimization, textbook compilation, teaching research, new project application, and academic paper writing. These key practices of "joint enterprise" enabled its faculty members to cultivate abilities to find, diagnose, research, and work out practice and teaching problems, enhancing their sense of belonging, achievement and success (Wenger, 1998) and improving the effectiveness of college English teacher professional development.

3.4 Integration of Teaching and Researching under Expert Teachers' Instruction, Assistance and Guidance: Developing Mode of Community of Practice

To improve teaching efficiency, college English teachers needed to conduct teaching-related researches, including the researches about teaching approaches and teaching contents (Shu, 2012). Researching teaching was not only an explorative process in the community of learning to collectively reflect on and work out practice and teaching problems (Hu & Tang, 2012; Yang, 2016), but also a development progress to regard teaching practices from the perspective of academic theories and use academic theories to guide teaching practices (Wallace, 2002). To be devoted to teaching researches to become teacher researchers was both the current means and objectives for college English teacher professional development (Hu & Tang, 2012).

To help the faculty members to improve teaching research abilities to promote professional development, the course constructed communities of practice in the modes of integration of teaching and researching under expert (senior) teachers' *instruction, assistance and guidance*, making full use of expert teachers' organization ability and academic leadership (Yang, et al., 2001).

In the pre-project phase, the expert teachers of the community would organize series of seminars and academic sessions to do collective brainstorming about project implementation. Based on full discussion and negotiation, the expert teachers helped to design programs, plan progresses, divide tasks, and define goals of the project. For effective integration of teaching and researching, the expert teachers would try to offer relevant academic instructions and action research suggestions in the areas of disciplinary knowledge, theoretical support, problem solution, and achievement form, providing academic and researching guidance for the community members to conduct "reflective observation" effectively. Also, the expert teachers would offer assistance in drawing up specific teaching and researching programs, helping community members to conduct "concrete experiencing" to promote project construction.

During the in-project phase, the expert teachers actively participated in the "joint enterprise" process themselves, fulfilling their construction tasks on the one hand and helping to work out possible puzzles and problems that the community members might encounter. In accordance with the requirements in the project formative assessments, the expert teachers conducted earnest evaluations and assessments of community members' respective fulfillments of teaching and researching programs, providing feedbacks and suggestions for possible remedies and further improvements.

In the post-project phrase, the expert teachers, via project conclusion and summarization, guided and assisted community members to conduct "abstract conceptualization" about teaching and researching processes, achievements gained and improvements needed, working out teaching problems from academic and theoretical generalization, publicizing researching processes, publishing teaching and researching achievements, and creating new knowledge for others to draw on and use (Huber & Hutchings, 2005).

4. Effects of Community of Practice on College English Teacher Professional Development

The successful construction of communities of practice exerted active effects on college English teacher professional development, the exploration of which could offer a brand new learning means and resource for teachers' life-long learning (Fang. 2006). In general, the communities of practice of the course exerted very obvious and positive effects on the teacher professional development, which could be proved in such concrete teacher professional development achievements as various academic researching publications in prestigious foreign languages journals in China, all kinds of teaching awards and honors obtained, both individually and collectively, higher academic titles promotions, and new teaching and researching projects applied. The faculty members of the course shared a sense of belonging, achievement and success, gaining and promoting the social status and recognitions of being college English teachers (Ding & Wang, 2011).

Since the needs for the faculty members' professional development were diversified, the specific roles that the faculty members played in the communities of practice of the course could not be the same, leading to different effects on their professional development. These different effects, either in the aspects of teaching practice enhancement, teaching research development, or professional quality improvement, were revealed by follow-up studies with reflective journals and interviews, which were done from three different cases, respectively a senior, a middle-aged, and a junior, who were also the representatives of professor, associate professor and lecturer.

4.1 College English Teacher Professional Development Case One (Teacher A)

4.1.1 Engagement in Community of Practice: Instruction, Assistance and Guidance

Teacher A, one of the founders and leaders of the course, was the expert teacher in the communities of practice, who managed to construct platforms and ecologies for the faculty members' professional development by applying series of teaching and researching projects, drawing up project construction plans and programs, and coordinating the application of teacher professional development resources and facilities, playing a leading role in the construction of the communities of practice and a guiding role in faculty members' professional development.

The sustainable development of teacher practice called for innovation of teaching theories (Sun, 2011, p. 49). Teacher A was devoted to series of action researches on theory and practice. Teacher A's theory and practice integrated research achievements, such as SOLO-based teaching practice reforms and teaching assessment innovations, and Chinese culture-based project teaching designs and practices, were published in prestigious foreign language journals in Chinese, which were regarded as the localized college English teaching research by the editorial board. Apart from teaching research achievements published and series of teaching and researching projects applied, Teacher A managed to win various awards in teaching and research achievements both individually and collectively at the university, provincial and national levels, all of which helped to promote the development of the communities of practice and also set a good example for the community members to follow.

Apart from organizing seminars and academic sessions for the project-based communities of practice, and providing relevant academic instructions and guidance for community members to actively engage in the joint enterprise, Teacher A attached great importance to sharing repertoire and expertise to guide community members to innovate theory-based reflective teaching practices to improve teaching efficiency. Teacher A also showed great enthusiasms in sharing with community members the research achievements made and the potential research designs planned, enlightening and even pushing community members to perform relevant topic researches and project studies. Certainly, Teacher A was too glad to assist community members in the process of academic paper writing and publication, and teaching and researching project application, promoting the development of the communities of practice to a new high.

4.1.2 Reflection on Community Practice: Promoting Teacher Professional Development to Enrich Self and Realize Self

Community of practice created opportunities for its members to share practice experiences through informal communications, teaching observations and practice reflections, cultivating and developing their individualized experiences and teaching techniques to work out those uncertain teaching and practice problems in complex teaching circumstances (Yang et al., 2012). "Communities of practice of the course are win-win platforms for the

sustainable development of the course construction and the effective improvement of faculty members' professional development, in which the former helps to create better ecologies and environments for the latter, while the latter contributes to the higher development of the former". This is what Teacher A used to encourage the faculty members to be actively engaged in the construction of the communities.

Relying on the constructions of the communities of practice, Teacher A managed to realize self-values by having achieved high-level developments in innovative teaching practices and academic researches that were evidently indicated by being granted various teaching awards and honors, completing various teaching and researching projects, having research achievements published, and being invited to deliver academic lectures, and participating in various contests and project assessments as an expert panel member, enabling him to win respects and admirations. Once invited to give a speech at a prize awarding ceremony, Teacher A said "…there is still much for me to do, and I am very grateful to the teaching faculties and the communities of practice, but for them, I couldn't have made the current achievement, at least not now".

More importantly, Teacher A's teaching career was enriched by offering instruction, assistance and guidance for community members to share teaching theories and concepts to motivate internal drives, conduct reflective observations and action researches, internalize the shared repertoire into knowledge systems, develop autonomous practice and research consciousness, and promote teacher professional development in the pursuit of joint enterprise. Once asked in a casual talk about the efforts made to help the community members, Teacher A said, "Communities of practice seem to a temporary family of mutual help, and only when most, if not all, family members have made advancements and progresses, can the family be regarded as successful. I really feel a sense of success to see the progresses and achievements that community members have made".

4.2 College English Teacher Professional Development Case Two (Teacher B)

4.2.1 Advancement in Community of Practice: Involvement, Contribution and Attainment

Teacher B, with over 20 years' teaching experience, once worked as a Chinese teacher in the United States and has accumulated rich experience in teaching Chinese culture in English. Giving full play to her own initiative, Teacher B has always been very enthusiastic about action research, constantly reflecting on her years of teaching experience, and taking actions to innovate classroom teaching methods. Based on project-based learning (PBL) theory and production-oriented approach (POA) theory, Teacher B initiated a content-based extracurricular cultural extension teaching model, which was the abstract conceptualization of her teaching experience.

Through personal reflection and active experimentation, Teacher B has transformed her individualized innovative teaching ideas into the shared knowledge of the community, and gradually developed the teaching model of extracurricular cultural extension as a distinctive teaching feature of the course to cultivate students' intercultural communication competence in field trips.

The teaching reflection practice that combined experience, perception, cognition and behavior provided an effective guide for Teacher B to transform and create new teaching ideas. Through learning by doing and doing in learning, Teacher B combined specific teaching practice with action research. She has gradually achieved her professional development in both teaching and research, successfully being promoted to a senior professional title as well as accomplishing a lot in teaching and research. Teacher B won the first prize in classroom teaching contest of the university, presided over the demonstration course project of the university, and instructed students to conduct extracurricular academic research innovation project.

4.2.2 Reflection on Community Practice: Promoting Ability and Career as Benefits of Teacher Professional Development

In the communities of practice, teachers supported each other, cooperated and negotiated with each other, innovating teaching methods, and sharing teaching and research concepts and resources. Communities of practice created opportunities to accumulate teaching experience, improve professional quality, and create ideal environments for teacher professional development. Teacher B wrote in her teaching journals, "…The success of this cultural extension teaching model, first of all, lies in the fact that our communities of practice have clear joint teaching objectives: combining theoretical knowledge obtained in classroom with practical applications in field trips and improving students' intercultural communication skills. Secondly, our communities of practice actively collaborate in the innovation of teaching methods and strategies so that we can share best practices in teaching and learning. Lastly, we provide each other with affectionate support to achieve sustainable development of the whole team."

Teaching innovation and knowledge sharing have enabled the community members to engage in more meaningful teaching practices, discussions and reflections, and to think deeply about their contributions to the

"joint enterprise" of the community. Upon her promotion to associate professor, Teacher B expressed her appreciation of the communities of practice, "If not for the assistance and support from senior teachers and other members in the community, it would be impossible for me to move ahead in my career. But for the involvement and participation in the community, I wouldn't have achieved so much, such as wining the teaching contest, managing projects and publishing research papers." Through innovation, practice, reflection and re-practice in teaching task designs, teaching managements and teaching evaluations, the community members have achieved the improvement of teacher professional development and the promotion of academic titles, because teacher professional development is a dynamic process of improving professional quality and perfecting the belief system through continuous learning and reflection in teaching practice.

4.3 College English Teacher Professional Development Case Three (Teacher C)

4.3.1 Growth in Community of Practice: Learning, Practice and Research

Teacher C, a junior, is one of the young backbone teachers in the communities of practice. She is mainly responsible for teaching practices and action researches of online-offline blended teaching. Teacher C has always taken the initiative to observe and learn from other senior and expert teachers. During her years as a green hand, Teacher C thoroughly studied the collective teaching resources of the community and applied what she learned into practice, as a result of which her teaching and research abilities have been greatly improved. Based on years of observations, practices and reflections, Teacher C actively carried out teaching action researches and teaching practices, and summarized individualized experiences into abstract teaching concepts and applied them into teaching practices, creating a new model of museum-school cooperative teaching. Teacher C, together with other member teachers, has built several cultural practice teams with distinctive themes, such as Kunqu Opera Museum practice team, traditional Chinese Medicine Museum practice team, Grand Canal culture practice team, etc. The museum-school cooperative teaching model proposed by Teacher C was a combination of theory and application, which proved to facilitate classroom teaching, and strengthen practical application, contributing to students' comprehension, integration, migration, and application of their knowledge and skills in the process of problem-solving. This new teaching model helped to foster students' learning capacity and shape their values, prompting them to reflect on their learning processes and outcomes, which has effectively upgraded the teaching quality.

Through sharing, communication and reflection between Teacher C and other members of the community, the team cooperated to conduct a cultural inheritance and cultivation project to enhance students' practical application of theoretical knowledge and cultivate their intercultural communication skills. Through the repeated cycle of "experience", "perception", "cognition" and "behavior", Teacher C has benefited a lot in teaching innovation practices and scientific researches. She won the first prize in the teaching contest of the university as well as the state-level second prize in the "Teaching Star'' Contest held by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. Progress in teaching apart, Teacher C is now presiding over a Jiangnan Culture Project related to museum-school cooperation and a key project of the Provincial Federation of Social Science.

4.3.2 Reflection on Community Practice: Growing up From a Novice to an Experienced Teacher

Communities of practice were composed of front-line teachers working together, who focused on solving teaching and practice problems. They jointly participated in formal and informal training activities to share and develop practical knowledge as well teaching and research concepts. Therefore, the identity of participating teachers in the community has been developed (Yang etc., 2012). "Novice" teachers have strong internal development needs, but in professional development, they still need guidance from expert teachers, peer consultation and support. On receiving the first prize in the teaching contest of university, Teacher C expressed her gratitude to the community, "Without the guidance of expert teachers in the community and the support of my community members, I could not have made such rapid progress in teaching design and practice."

The support and encouragement from the community had a huge positive impact on young teachers, which was conducive to their professional growth, gradually helping them transform from novices to experienced teachers, which in turn contributed further to the sustainable development of the community. Teacher C once said in a course faculty seminar, "Had not it been for the community, I would be still struggling working out teaching and research problems alone and would not have grown into an experienced teacher. Now I have a strong sense of belonging and have more confidence to face challenges at work." In the process of transformation from "novice" teachers to "experienced" teachers, the new knowledge created by community members through internalized reflections has become a repertoire of resources to be shared by members for further practice.

The construction of museum-school cooperative teaching model is an outcome of following the sequence of pre-project planning and designing, in-project concrete practice and action experimentation, and post-project

reflection and conceptualization. In one of Teacher C's reflective journals, she wrote, "…To improve students' language competence in expressing their cultural knowledge, field training in a featured local museum, China Kunqu Museum, would be one of the best choices. With prepared notes for the art of Kunqu, students were encouraged to introduce Kunqu in English to overseas friends visiting the museum. Students' written reflections on the field training in turn inspired me to further improve the teaching model and carry out follow-up action researches." Motivated by Teacher C, other community members also joined in the practice of museum-school cooperative teaching model and carried out related researches. The action researches and related achievements of community members have played an effective motivating role, truly achieving win-win developments through mutual supports and negotiations.

5. Conclusion

Community of practice is a co-learning and co-developing organization for college English teachers. To enrich the concrete experiential leaning for its faculty members, the course depended on various teaching and researching projects to construct various communities of practice with effective operation mechanisms, specific construction contents and feasible development modes. These communities of practice created ideal ecologies and environments for the professional development of its faculty members to explore into teaching and practice problems, innovate teaching and practice approaches and processes, conduct teaching and practice researches, and improve teacher professional development abilities and qualities.

The construction of communities of practice generated encouraging achievements. On the one hand, it effectively promoted the sustainable development of the course that has been constructed into a Provincial First-rate Blended Massive Online Open Course and granted the First-prize Winner of Higher Education and Teaching Practice and Research Achievement of the university. Relevant teaching and researching achievements were published in such prestigious foreign language journals as Foreign Language World, Shandong Foreign Language Teaching, Foreign Language Testing and Teaching, and so on, realizing a more extensive "shared repertoire". On the other hand, it substantially helped its faculty members to update knowledge constructs, improve teaching techniques, develop research competencies, and build a collaborative teaching and researching community culture, promoting the professional development of individual members and advancing the construction efficacy of the community.

Constructing communities of practice to promote college English teacher professional development is just an explorative case practice, whose rationales, particularly those of the running platforms on teaching and researching projects and the operating mechanisms of project management and assessment, deserve further scientific and theoretical verifications, but whose concrete effects on the developments of the course and its faculty members might provide possible enlightenments for more qualitative and quantitative studies on the approaches to promoting college English teacher professional development.

Note

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