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Analysis Of Elementary School English Teachers' Professional Dialogue As Their Professional Development

Chin-Wen Chien
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Abstract: This qualitative study analyzed the professional dialogue among 67 English teachers at seven elementary schools in New Taipei City in Taiwan. Based on the analysis of the documentation, observation, and interviews, the study has two major findings. First, the knowledge and skills covered in the professional dialogues of English teachers concerned planning, implementing, and managing instruction. Second, English teachers regarded their professional dialogues as effective and goal-oriented. In order to make professional dialogues into job-embedded professional development for English teachers, they must be goal-oriented and carried out in an environment of care and trust. Moreover, professional dialogue can take the form of curriculum development and lesson planning in order to help English teachers construct their professional knowledge and competence through social interaction.

Keywords: curriculum development, goal-oriented, lesson planning, professional dialogue, professional development

Introduction

Teachers in Taiwan who teach the same curriculum or content areas are required to form a committee and meet regularly to discuss the curriculum. Fostering professional dialogue among teachers of the same content areas has been strongly emphasized and encouraged (Chung, Shen, & Huang, 2008). There are only few studies on professional dialogue in Taiwan (Hsu, 2012; Shen, 2006; Wang, 2007; Yang, 2009), and none of them have focused on elementary school English education. This study used Guskey's (2000) model to analyze the knowledge base covered in professional dialogues and English teachers' attitudes to the professional dialogues. The study enabled educators' insights into how professional dialogue should be carried out among elementary school teachers.

This qualitative study focused on elementary school English teachers' professional dialogue in New Taipei City. The study addressed the following questions. First, what knowledge and skills were covered and discussed in the professional dialogue? Second, what were English teachers' attitudes and responses to professional dialogue as a means of professional development? Third, what factors influenced the effectiveness of professional dialogue as job-embedded professional development for elementary school English teachers? Suggestions on the effective use of professional dialogue as professional development are offered in this article.

Literature Review

The researcher discusses the definition, importance, and current empirical studies of professional dialogue. A review of the literature reveals the importance of understanding both how professional dialogue is situated within educational discourse, and how it contributes to the conceptual framework for the current study. Throughout the literature, the terms “professional talk,” “conversation,” or “dialogue” are used interchangeably by scholars, but regardless of which term is used, this type of discourse is regarded as a powerful site for supporting the construction of professional knowledge (Clark, 2001). Orland-Bark (2006) regarded professional conversations as “social contexts for constructing and negotiating meanings, for creating spaces for participants to bring their practice under critical scrutiny and for locating their voices in their experiences and in the experiences of others” (p. 15).

Conversation and dialogue are practiced in different formats in schools. A discussion conversation is a way of conversing about issues and encouraging participant teachers to share their feelings and ideas (Jenlink & Carr, 1996), while a dialogue conversation occurs when people become aware of others' assumptions and thereby reflect upon their own assumptions (Lambert, 1995, p. 86). Leading conversation is a process where leaders facilitate and sustain conversations so that participants can make sense of their experiences (Lambert, 1995).

Professional dialogue among teachers leads them to gain multiple perspectives on problem solving and on issues of concern (Bailey, 1996; Howelett, 2004; Holbach & Rich, 2004; O'Brien, 2004; Grey, 2011; Lynch, Madden, & Knight, 2014). Professional dialogue is crucial for teachers because it is embedded in the complex nature of teaching. Professional dialogue can reflect important assumptions about teaching and explore the nature of student learning (Grey, 2011). Moreover, dialogue is in the nature of professionalism because it fosters teachers' professional learning. Teachers share their concerns and problems and they receive feedback and from other teachers (Danielson, 2009; Goker, 2012). Furthermore, teachers can construct their professional identity through talking with other colleagues (Cohen, 2008; Levine & Marcus, 2010).

Orland-Barak (2006) explored the process and content of ten mentors' professional conversations as part of the collaborative construction of knowledge about mentoring. Three types of conversations were found in her study: convergent dialogues, parallel dialogues, and divergent dialogues. In convergent dialogues, mentors mediate their understandings that converge into learning about possible solutions to a particular dilemma encountered in mentoring. In parallel dialogue, mentors use the conversation space as a setting for developing their ideas through a dialogue among themselves. Finally, in divergent dialogue, mentors shift the focus of the conversation to issues outside their particular contexts and theorize about the concepts of mentoring. In this study, professional dialogue among Taiwanese elementary school English teachers focuses on instructional strategies, more like parallel dialogues.

In another study of teacher conversation, Mills (2001) describes how teachers formed study groups in order to discuss their curriculum, evaluation, beliefs and practice. They also made a curriculum conversation framework, as in Table 1 (Mills, 2001, p. 24). In this current study, Taiwanese elementary school English teachers' professional dialogue remains only on Wondering and Looking closely steps. Teachers regarded curricular conversations as essential, because these conversations helped them appreciate the teaching philosophy, common practices, and the language of inquiry. Mills (2001) suggested that teachers should recognize the power of conversation because, “The most sophisticated ideas were born, refined, and often transformed through honest teacher talk” (p. 27).

Curriculum Conversation Framework: Center for Inquiry				
Wondering (Burning issues)	Looking closely (focused observations)	Making new connections (interpretation)	New questions	Making informal predictions (new plans/ curricular decisions)

Table 1: Curriculum Conversation Framework

Edwards-Groves and Hardy (2013) analyzed the critical reflective dialogue among nineteen teachers, two principals, and five executive team members of two primary schools in Australia over three years. One teacher claimed: “This means we all have to be more critical, we have to try to go deeper when we reflect on what we currently do...so we have a clearer idea of what we need to change” (p. 122). Reflective dialogue was a key motivation in development of practice among participating teachers because it required teachers to go beyond reflecting, discussing, and recounting practices to challenge each other so that practices would change (Edwards-Groves and Hardy, 2013; Simoncini, Lasen, & Rocco, 2014).

Carroll (2005) studied the interactive talk among five teacher interns and an elementary school principal in a school-based mentor teacher-study group. These interns had their joint knowledge constructed through revoicing, which included restating (repeating an idea to invite additional attention or concurrence), recycling (reintroducing an idea from earlier in the session to position it in relation to a current observation), reconceptualizing (developing or broadening an example into a more general idea), recontextualizing (shifting the perspectives brought to bear on an example and making a warranted inference), and making a warranted reference (making an inference based on the previous speaker’s comment and implicitly inviting agreement or disagreement) (p. 465).

Lucietto (2008) studied twelve teacher trainers’ design and delivery of modules (of 27 hours) of continuous professional development among in-service teachers of different languages and grade levels in Italy. Under the leadership of teacher trainers, participating teachers reflected on their classroom practice in the format of a professional dialogue. At first, the teachers felt reluctant to share with teachers of different languages (German, Italian, French) and grade levels, but later they appreciated the trainers’ professional skills and the opportunity to get to know colleagues of other languages and from different schools and grade levels. Lucietto (2008) concluded that professional dialogue remains an available asset and it is already a reality that future projects organized by individual schools or networks will see professional dialogue in action again (p. 125).

From this review we can see that although several studies have focused on the professional dialogues of language teachers (e.g., Atay, 2004; Gwyn-Paquette & Tochon, 2002; Ishihara & Maeda, 2005; Lucietto, 2008), very few have investigated professional teacher dialogue in Taiwan (Hsu, 2012; Shen, 2006; Wang, 2007; Yang, 2009), and none has looked at professional dialogue among Taiwanese elementary school teachers. Using Guskey’s (2005) Conceptual Framework for Professional Dialogue (Figure 1), the current study, then, attempts to fill this gap by examining the attitudes towards the usefulness and effectiveness of professional dialogue among elementary school teachers in Taiwan.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Professional Dialogue for Elementary School English Teachers' Professional Development.

Levels 1 and 2 of Guskey's (2005) levels of professional development evaluation were used to evaluate the content, process, and context of professional dialogue as job-embedded professional development for elementary school English teachers. The process is professional dialogue. The content refers to what knowledge and skills are covered and discussed in the professional dialogue, and the analysis focused on Level 2 (participant's learning) to answer the research question: "What knowledge base and skills are covered and discussed in the professional dialogue?" The analysis of Level 1 (participant's reaction) was used to answer the research questions: "What are English teachers' attitudes and responses to professional dialogue as job-embedded professional development?" and "What factors influenced the effectiveness of professional dialogue as job-embedded professional development for elementary school English teachers?"

Method

This is a qualitative study. Qualitative research begins with assumptions, the possible theoretic lens, and the research problems; then, the researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry by collecting the data in the natural setting and analyzing and interpreting the data for themes or patterns (Boeije, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). By employing the qualitative research approach in this study through extensive data collection and analysis of English teachers' professional dialogues, the researcher was able to obtain an in-depth understanding of the learning process that the English teachers experienced and their interpretation of their own experiences and learning in their school setting. Qualitative research can also answer the "Wh -" questions such as, "What knowledge base and skills are covered and discussed in professional dialogue?"

Setting and Participants

The researcher conducted a survey into 154 elementary school English teachers' professional dialogue in New Taipei City in September 2013. The study revealed that professional dialogue was primarily led by the teacher leaders during their common time and in their classrooms. Some of the novice teachers lacked the competence to lead the professional dialogue. The format and topics discussed during the professional dialogue among elementary school English teachers in New Taipei City influenced the effectiveness of professional dialogue (Chien, 2018). Based on the data collection, the researcher first made a list of schools where the professional dialogue among English teachers had been regularly and effectively held. The researcher contacted English teachers who had completed the survey and shown an interest in becoming involved in the follow-up observations and interviews. Moreover, the researcher used to work as an elementary school English teacher and was appointed as an instructional coach in New Taipei City, so convenience sampling was used in this study. The instructional coaches and teacher trainers who the researcher knows or has worked with before also recommended some English teachers.

Participants in this study included seven English teacher leaders from seven elementary schools. The school and participants' demography are revealed in Table 2 (the names are pseudonyms) with a total of 67 English teachers. Of the seven schools, two are small with less than 20 classes, one is medium sized with 45 classes, and four are large schools with more than 60 classes. The number of English teachers in these schools ranged from five to thirteen. The seven schools all conducted extracurricular English activities, such as songs and chant contests, reader's theater contests, or events for holidays. Except for Eugene Elementary School, all these schools had an established English teachers' learning community.

	Class Size	Amounts of English teachers	Extracurricular English activities	Features of English education
Andrew	45	8	ladder English songs and chant contest English Oral Test Judge	diversities of English education on building learners' English abilities lesson study teacher's learning community
Brian	84	13	songs and chant contest Reader's theater contest	school-based curriculum international curriculum teacher's learning community
Charles	17	9	songs and chant contest	experimental curriculum teacher's learning community
Donald	65	9	Reader's theater contest	teacher's learning community
Eugene	26	5	Halloween events	basic skills
Francis	92	13	English radio programs English TV programs Halloween trick or treat Christmas caroling	diversities of English education on building learners' English abilities teacher's learning community
Gilbert	73	10	Halloween trick or treat English DJ pen pals with schools from the U.S.A.	teacher's learning community

Table 2: Participants' Demography

Data Collection

Data used in this study included documentation, observation, and interviews. The data collection lasted for half a year, starting from September 2013. The first type of data is documentation including the minutes of meetings on professional dialogue. A total of 50 minutes of meetings including twenty electronic ones from Andrew Elementary School, five paper-based ones from Donald Elementary School as in Figure 2, and five electronic ones from each of the five schools. Teacher leaders took the notes of the professional dialogue as minutes of meetings for their schools' records. The researcher asked for the permissions to have the documentation.

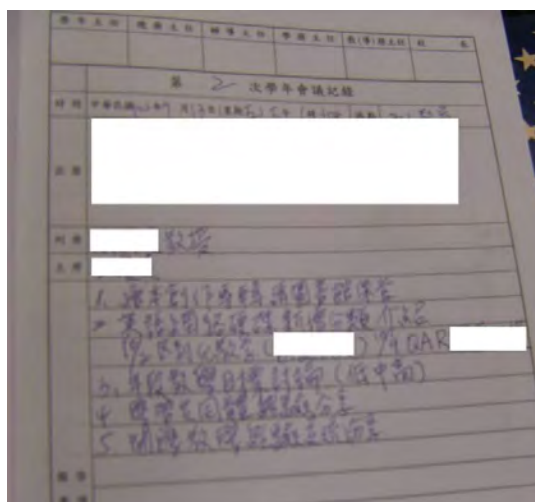


Figure 2. Minutes of meeting on a professional dialogue in Donald Elementary School

The second type of data is observational field notes. The researcher attended, observed, and took field notes during the English teachers' professional dialogues. Elementary school English teachers' professional dialogue was conducted both in English and Chinese. A total of twenty observations were conducted on ten occasions at Andrew Elementary School and on five occasions at Charles Elementary School. Due to the schedule conflicts in the English teachers' professional dialogue, only one observation was conducted in the other five schools. The number of observation field notes in these five schools was another research limitation.

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study in order to explore issues, probe the teachers, and follow up the responses and allow for interaction (Flick, 1998; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989; Kvale, 1996). An interview protocol was designed for interviewing the participating teachers. The first part of the interview was related to the teacher's and the school's background such as "Briefly tell me about your school." The second part of the interview was related to professional dialogue, such as "Describe the previous professional dialogue carried out among English teachers." Seven English teacher leaders were interviewed and they answered in both Chinese and English. Each interview lasted for at least an hour and was conducted at the end of each observation. All the interviews were transcribed.

Data Analysis

Observational field notes, photos taken during the professional dialogues, documentation, and interviews were transcribed into raw field notes. The data was coded in the following three stages as in Figure 3. First, the researcher read through all the notes and marked the data with a code (e.g., effective, goal, leaders, workshops, etc.). Secondly, while reading through these codes, the researcher tentatively assigned categories (e.g., responses, situations, announcements, topics). A set of codes for thematic analysis that captured the meaning expressed by the data was constructed (Flick, 1998). Finally, the data was sorted on the basis of its relevance into topics that reflected the research questions (i.e. attributes, knowledge construction, attitude).

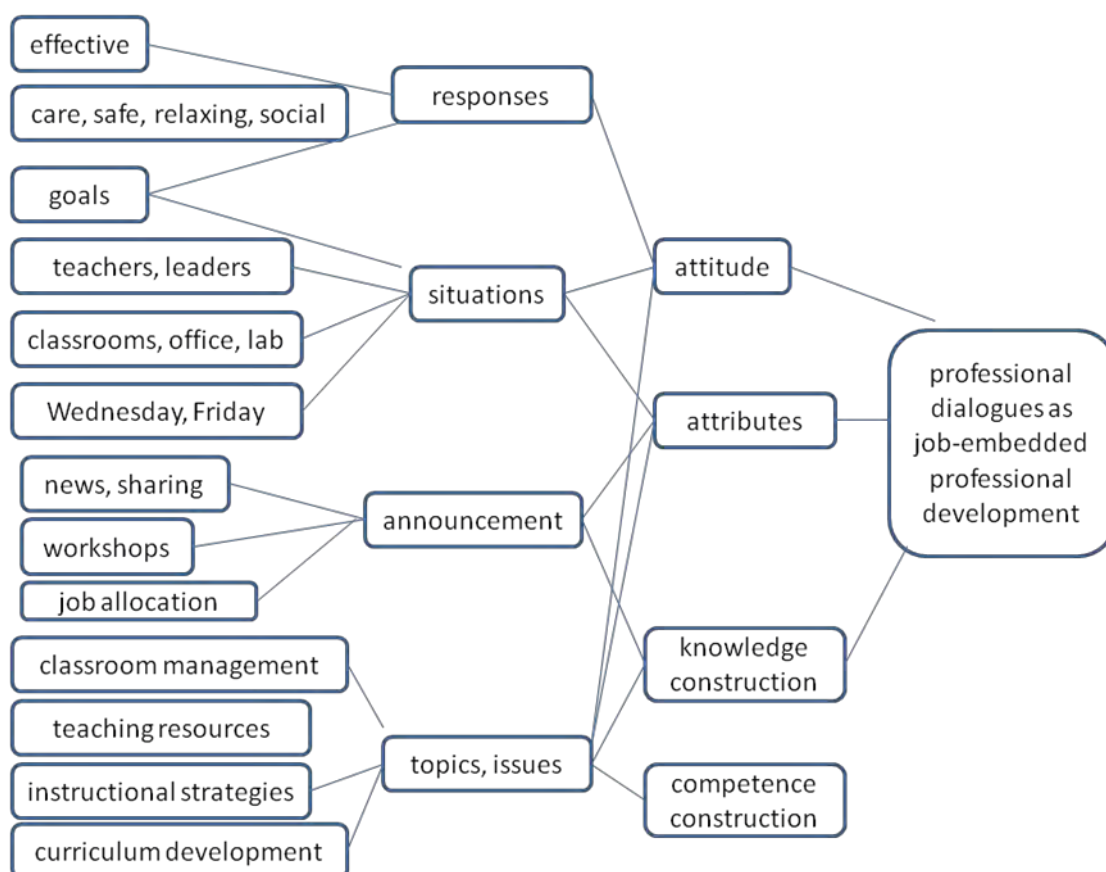


Figure 3. Coding and Data Analysis

Results

Based on the data analysis, English teachers' attitudes to professional dialogue and issues and topics covered in the professional dialogue are discussed below.

English Teacher's Attitude to Professional Dialogue

All seven English teacher leaders had a positive attitude to their professional dialogue and they all regarded their professional dialogue as effective. The teacher leader at Donald Elementary School responded, "The professional dialogue was effective, because we shared up-to-date news." Furthermore, the teacher from Francis Elementary School said,

All English teachers work very effectively and efficiently during the professional dialogue. We want to finish all the tasks on time. In addition to the professional dialogue, we share news and information via meeting minutes in the format of electronic documents or hard copies.

Two teacher leaders at Brian and Eugene Elementary School regarded their professional dialogue as being goal-oriented. The leader from Brian Elementary School claimed,

“The focus of our professional dialogue is on discussing the international curriculum. We have a very clear goal. Moreover, all the teachers have the same target and interest in the international curriculum.” English teachers’ professional dialogue in this study reflected their different expertise. Professional dialogues will be effective if they have a clear agenda and specific objectives (Clark, 2001).

All the seven English teacher leaders thought the atmosphere was friendly. The teacher from Eugene Elementary School said, “Professional dialogue was relaxing and easygoing. Every teacher is busy. During the professional dialogue, we could collaborate and discuss. All teachers have closer relationships.” Teachers’ professional dialogue must occur in a safe and trusting environment (Bowman, 2003; Clark, 2001). Clark (2001) claimed that good conversation requires safety, trust, and care, because conversation engagement invites teachers and participants to expose their vulnerability by sharing their experiences and expressing opinions. Teachers have to feel that other teachers care about them and their teaching, so they feel it is safe to tell each other their story.

Issues Discussed During the Professional Dialogue

In addition to announcements and English teachers’ shared professional learning, the top issues discussed and shared during the professional dialogue were instructional strategies and activity design ($n = 127$), followed by curriculum development ($n = 70$), classroom management ($n = 41$), English contests and extracurricular English activities ($n = 26$), remedial education ($n = 26$), and teaching resources ($n = 21$).

The issues discussed in the professional dialogue are aligned with Danielson’s (2009) suggestions on topics and big ideas such as “What constitutes important learning?” or “What causes learning?” Professional dialogue is one type of professional development where teachers discuss and share issues relevant to their practice (Adger, Hoyle, & Dickinson, 2004; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000; Lieberman & Miller, 2001). Teachers talk about their work in a way that is aligned with the theoretical basis of their knowledge, thinking, and learning. Such professional dialogue occurs in a sociocultural context, where teachers’ learning and talk are shaped through the interactions and the mental processes of the participating teachers (Adger, et al, 2004).

Teachers in Donald Elementary School shared what they did in the first week of the school concerning the grouping of students, classroom rules, reviewing, giving English names, and so on, as in Example 1:

Example 1: Instructional Strategies and Activity Design.

T1: I grouped students heterogeneously. I paired up a student with lower English proficiency level with an advanced learner, so the advanced learner could help his or her partner.

T2: In the first week I introduced the classroom rules. I helped students review what they learned before, such as alphabet letters, phonics, and words.

In this study, participants shared their instructional strategies and activity designs for

grouping and the first lesson with the class. Language teachers should have knowledge of the management of innovation in language teaching (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2006); that is, language teachers should be involved in “managing developmental change in the design, implementation, and maintenance of teaching (and/or testing) materials, methodological skills, and pedagogical values that are perceived as new by individuals who comprise a formal (language) education system” (Markee, 1994, p. 1).

Four schools in this study used their professional dialogue time to discuss their curriculum. Charles Elementary School is a new school established in 2013. The English teacher leader led three native English speaking teachers and two Taiwanese English teachers in developing their own experimental curriculum, as in Example 2 and Figure 4.

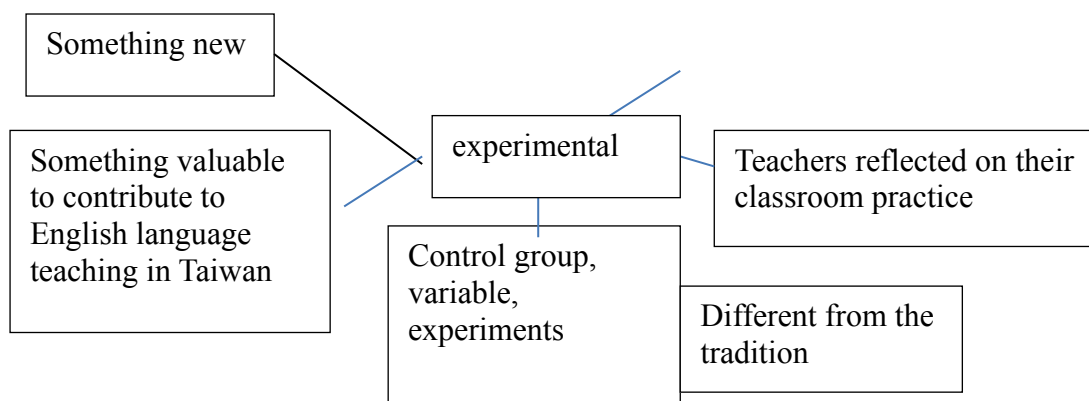


Figure 4. Teachers' Brainstorm of Experimental Program

Example 2: Curriculum Development.

The English teacher leader asked the teachers these questions: “If this is the experimental program, what are the expectations?” or “What came to your mind when you heard the word “experimental”?” The English teacher leader wrote down the ideas these teachers came up with, as in Figure 4.

Teachers in this study discussed and developed the international curriculum during their professional dialogues. English teachers need to be able to link their knowledge with their classroom practices in a more sociopolitically and culturally informed manner (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2006); thus, by understanding the sociopolitical and cultural connotations of teaching English as an international language, English teachers can explore the linguistics of English as a global communication tool. Teachers' self-actualization, motivation, and sense of achievement are integral to successful decision making on curriculum and lesson planning (Marshall, 1990). In Sharkey's (2004) study, nine English teachers were invited to participate in developing a curriculum for the district's elementary magnet English program. Curriculum development and lesson planning does not occur in a vacuum, but within a context. Contextualizing is an intellectual process whereby these nine teachers were constructing a conceptual framework for decision making about the curriculum and lesson planning. They also struggled to define their work while recognizing the factors that helped define it for them.

Three teachers in Andrew Elementary School shared their reward systems in September during the professional dialogue, as in Example 3.

Example 3: Classroom Management.

*T1: 1 bookmark for 50 points and 2 bookmarks for 100 points for stationery.
T2: 1. Stamps for bookmarks. 2. No homework. 3. Internet Café. 4. Spelling rewards (A–Z) 5. Spelling reward (easy word, e.g., c-a-t).*

T3: Stamps, money for exchange, Poetry café.

Language teachers often explain the reasons behind the rules, reward systems, and their decisions on the first lesson with the class. Three teachers in Example 3 shared their reward systems and demonstrated one of their classroom management skills. However, Paul (2003) asserts that rewards can “weaken interest...weaken active learning...[and] are shallow...and divisive” (p. 115). Instead of physical rewards (i.e., candies, stickers) and praise, language teachers can envision the language classrooms as a game-like learning environment, make the materials less stressful, and create a feeling of interest for learners. In order that they can have principles and strategies for classroom management, language teachers should have Shulman’s (1987) “general pedagogical knowledge.”

English teachers met and discussed the Halloween event in October at Gilbert Elementary School during their monthly professional dialogue in Example 4.

Example 4: English Contest and Extracurricular English Activities.

T1: We will prepare candies for Halloween. Students answer the questions and get stickers. They exchange their stickers for the candies. There will be fifteen stations around the campus including Principal’s Office.

T2: We have new teachers. We can tell them the English words and expressions.

T3: For lower grades, the sentence is “Happy Halloween.” For the middle grades, the sentence and phrase are “trick or treat” and “Happy Halloween.” For upper grades, students have to do the actions and say, “Trick or treat. Smell my feet. Give me something good to eat” and “Happy Halloween.”

T2: English teachers can review these phrases and sentences in English classes. Students will dress up by themselves.

T3: I will write these words on the blackboard as hints for students.

T2: Be sure to take pictures of students who put on special costume.

Six teachers at Andrew Elementary School discussed remedial education in terms of its content, objectives, or materials during their professional dialogue in November, as in Example 5.

Example 5: Remedial Education.

T1: What should fifth graders achieve in the remedial education program, alphabet, phonics, words, or sentences?

T2: Most students should build their skills in phonics, so it will be easier for them to read words.

T3: In my opinion, easy readers can be integrated into the remedial education.

T4: You can divide the lessons into sections. First, review the whole lesson. Use the rest of time based on individual learners’ needs.

T5: I think students should have a sense of achievement when they go back to their regular English classes after the remedial education.

T6: You can try the materials provided by the Ministry of Education’s website.

In addition to the required teaching hours and other responsibilities, elementary school English teachers are required to devote themselves to English remedial education for students at the low proficiency level (Wu, 2007). Orientation and professional development should be provided for teachers of the remedial education programs. The professional development should cover such topics as goals, curriculum, standards, and teaching strategies, so teachers will be familiar with the objectives of the remedial education and how they should teach it in order to meet the objectives (Chien, 2014).

On their first professional dialogue of the 2013 academic year, the English teacher leader at Donald Elementary School introduced the topic of the school’s resources, particularly for the new teachers (see Example 6) and Figure 2 was the minutes of meetings on a professional dialogue on that day.

Example 6: Teaching Resources and Materials.

You can find resources on our school's hard drive, including lists of picture books, activities, and worksheets on holiday instruction, Reading A–Z small books, Sam Books, etc.

Language teachers should be familiar with a wide range of standards-based materials, resources, and technologies. Moreover, English teachers should be able to choose, adapt, and use them in effective teaching (TESOL, 2009, p. 54).

Discussion

This study analyzed the professional dialogue among English teachers at seven elementary schools in New Taipei City based on the conceptual framework in Figure 1. First, the top issue discussed during the professional dialogues was instructional strategies and activity design. As for Level 2 “participants’ learning,” the knowledge and skills covered in the professional dialogues were related to English teachers’ planning, implementation, and management of instruction. Second, with regard to Level 1 “participants’ reaction,” English teachers in this study had positive attitudes to the professional dialogues, because they regarded these as effective and goal-oriented.

Job-embedded professional development is relevant for the individual teacher, because it occurs at the teacher’s place of work. The teacher’s learning becomes an integral part of the culture of the classroom—and by extension, the school. Therefore, in order to make the professional dialogue into the English teachers’ job-embedded professional development, several components need to be implemented and included, as shown in Figure 5. The professional dialogues must be carried out in an environment of care and trust, and goals need to be set and agreed upon by English teachers for their dialogues. English teachers can make use of professional dialogues for curriculum development, lesson planning, sharing, and reflection in order to construct their professional knowledge and competence. English teachers’ professional knowledge and competence construction can influence their classroom practice.

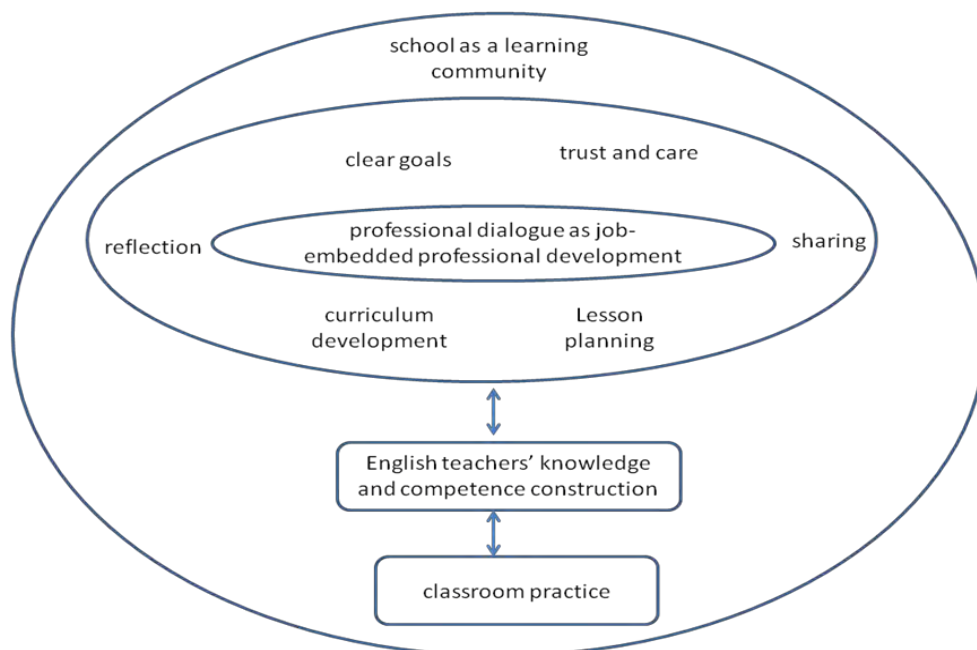


Figure 5. Professional Dialogue as English Teachers’ Job-Embedded Professional Development

Trust and Care in Professional Dialogue

Teachers have to take some time to build trust, respect, and relationships in the professional dialogue, so they can open up, be willing to share, and discuss pedagogical issues with other teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Healy et al, 2001; Mills, 2001). Mills (2001) argued that it is unlikely that exquisite professional conversations will occur until a caring, thoughtful community is in place.

Trust involves teachers' exposing themselves to possible harm. In a safe and trusting environment, teachers who share their classroom practice that have occurred in their classrooms will not feel a sense of shame that these events happened. They will not regard themselves as incompetent. Rather, they will be open-minded and willing to accept other teachers' suggestions.

Importance of Clear Goals

English teachers in this study regarded their professional dialogues as effective, because they thought they had clear goals and objectives. While the focus at Brian Elementary School was on the international curriculum and lesson planning, the objective at Charles Elementary School was to develop standards for their experimental program. Therefore, effective learning-focused conversation or dialogue must have a clear object in mind (Danielson, 2009; Lipton & Wellman, 2007). In order to grow professionalism through professional dialogues, English teachers should focus on one specific competence or area. English teachers should explicitly express their focus during the practice of the professional dialogues.

Professional Dialogue for Professional Knowledge and Competence Construction

Participants in this study constructed and developed their professional competence and knowledge through sharing and discussing issues (i.e., instructional strategies, teaching activities, teaching resources, classroom management, student' behavior) in the professional dialogue. Corcoran (1995) claimed that teachers' engagement in genuine dialogue on pedagogical issues such as teaching, curriculum, evaluation, and assessment will foster their professional development. Teachers develop professional competence through engaging in discourse as a joint productive activity discourse-joint productive activity (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Such endeavor yields a negotiated body of professional knowledge, beliefs, and norms for pedagogical practice as well as for sociolinguistic interaction in the group, and such professional dialogue engages English teachers in co-constructing knowledge about their craft (Adger, 2002). In other words, through professional dialogue, English teachers create communities of practice in which they can routinely inquire into the events and conditions of their practice (Wenger, 1998). Penlington (2008) suggested that professional dialogues among teachers must move beyond recounting teaching activities to evaluating their reasonableness as good teaching practices. Tillema and Orland-Barak (2006) regarded professional conversations as the venues where professional knowledge and competence are constructed as situational understandings, "a type of progressive understanding of situations that occurs in collaborative discourse about action in real contexts" (p. 604).

Professional Dialogue for Lesson Planning and Curriculum Development

Lesson planning and curriculum development during the professional dialogues can provide opportunities for teachers' professional growth and for learning collectively, because teachers' expertise can be revealed through lesson planning (El-Okda, 2005). Teachers' involvement in ongoing curriculum development and lesson planning is essentially a collaborative endeavor (El-Okda, 2005). Teachers can work collaboratively on lesson planning in a similar format to the Japan lesson study, in which teachers identify the goals for a lesson and the content area they want to work on together and may spend time collaboratively discussing and designing lessons which they then teach while others observe. When the teachers next meet they discuss their observations and ideas for to improve the lesson (Fernandez, Cannon, & Chokshi, 2003; Wiburg & Brown, 2007). Complex relationships exist between teachers, new materials, teaching practices, and peers. Teachers can construct themselves as pedagogical and curricular leaders among their peers (Leander & Osborne, 2008).

Conclusion

This study has analyzed the professional dialogues among English teachers in seven elementary schools in New Taipei City. The study has two major findings. First, the knowledge and skills covered in the professional dialogues of English teachers concerned planning, implementing, and managing instruction. Second, English teachers regarded their professional dialogues as effective and goal-oriented. In order to make professional dialogues into job-embedded professional development for English teachers, they must be goal-oriented and carried out in an environment of care and trust. Moreover, professional dialogue can take the form of curriculum development and lesson planning in order to help English teachers construct their professional knowledge and competence through social interaction.

From the perspective of language teacher education, this empirical study presents a framework for using professional dialogue for elementary school English teachers' job-embedded professional development. The findings of this study have provided English teachers, English teacher leaders, language teacher educators and trainers, and the bureaus of education with a framework for the implementation of professional dialogues that includes shared and clear goals, a caring and safe environment, knowledge and competence construction, and curriculum development and lesson planning. From a research perspective, this study has drawn on previous empirical research on professional dialogues among participants in different settings (Atay, 2004; Goodfellow, 2000; Johnston, 1994; Orland-Barak, 2006; Tillema & Orland-Barak, 2006); also, it has adopted multiple sources of data and rich descriptions to help contextualize the study of the use of professional dialogue for elementary school English teachers' professional development.

These seven schools in this study are either in urban or rural areas, but not in remote areas. Therefore, the findings of this case study cannot be generalized to all elementary school settings. However, the triangulated data collection can be used to explain the knowledge base discussed in elementary school English teachers' professional dialogue and teachers' attitudes and responses to the professional dialogues.

This study analyzes the knowledge base of issues discussed in the professional dialogues and the teachers' attitudes and responses to the dialogues. Teacher professional identities are defined in terms of the influences on the teachers, how they see themselves, and how they live their profession in their individual settings (Varghese, 2006). Teachers' perceptions of their own professional identity affect their efficacy and professional

development as well as their ability and willingness to cope with educational change and implement innovations in their own teaching practice (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000; Crafton & Kaiser, 2011). A further study could focus on how elementary school English teachers' professional identity is constructed through professional dialogue and how such professional identity influences their classroom practice, as in Gusky's Level 4 (participants' use of knowledge and skills). Moreover, teacher leadership is regarded as a vehicle for teacher professional development and improvement in school organization and classroom instruction (Smylie, 2008).

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