

A NEW PARADIGM IN ESL TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:
ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TAIWANESE ESL INSTRUCTORS

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Shiao-wei Chu

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Major Professor: Emily Duvall, Ph.D.

Authorization to Submit Dissertation

This dissertation of Shiao-wei Chu, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and titled “A New Paradigm in ESL Teaching and Learning Environments: Online Professional Development for Taiwanese ESL Instructors,” has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies to the College of Graduate Studies for approval.

Major Professor:

_____ Date: _____
Dr. Emily Duvall

Committee
Members:

_____ Date: _____
Dr. Allen Kitchel

_____ Date: _____
Dr. Paul Gathercoal

_____ Date: _____
Dr. Steven Chandler

Department
Administrator:

_____ Date: _____
Dr. Paul Gathercoal

Discipline's
College Dean:

_____ Date: _____
Dr. Corinne Mantle-Bromley

Final Approval and Acceptance by the College of Graduate Studies:

_____ Date: _____
Dr. Jie Chen

Abstract

This case study investigates the perspectives of four Taiwanese English ESL (English as a second language) teachers with regard to their participation in an online professional development course. To build a collaborative online professional development community, in which teachers acquire professional knowledge to improve teaching instruction and student learning, the study addresses teachers' voluntary participation and intrinsic motivation to engage in self-improvement and continuous learning (Maor, 2003; Yeh, 2007). Moreover, the research suggests that plans for professional development activities must include a bottom-up design (Guskey, 2000), a means of practical implementation (Darling-Hammond, 2005), and be based on a teacher-focused model (Yang & Liu, 2004).

Data sources include interviews, pre- and post-questionnaires, electronic documentation of subjects' participation, and field notes. Triangulation is used to determine themes and concerns, and findings are presented through rich, thick description. Although the teachers sometimes faced challenges when they applied the new teaching activities and/or materials from the online professional development course to their classrooms, the overall results reveal that they found the course beneficial with regard to not only new knowledge and skills but also in terms of their positive feelings of engagement in their work. Further the study indicates that an online professional development course (a) can offer teachers a learning opportunity that is not geographically or temporally limiting; (b) may facilitate the transfer and construction of pedagogical knowledge and professional skills that can have

implications for teachers' practice, and consequently on students' learning; and (c) can open up opportunities for international collaboration and social interaction with others.

Key Words: online professional development, ESL teachers, professional development, teachers' perspectives, Taiwanese ESL teachers

VITA

Shiao-wei Chu, Ph.D.

EDUCATION BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL:

Degrees:

- 2013 **Doctor of Philosophy**, Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A.
Dissertation Title: *A New Paradigm in ESL Teaching and Learning Environments: Online Professional Development for Taiwanese ESL Instructors*. July 2013.
- 2010 **Master of Arts**, (TESOL) Applied Foreign Languages, Chaoyang University of Technology, Wufeng District, Taichung, Taiwan
Thesis Title: *A Study of the Effect of Multimedia Application on EFL Students' Listening Comprehension*. August 2009.
- 2005 **Bachelor of Arts**, Applied Foreign Languages, Chaoyang University of Technology, Wufeng District, Taichung, Taiwan

Certifications

- 8/2009 Certified Secondary School and Junior High School English Teacher, Regist. No. 9801740, the Ministry of Education, Taipei, Taiwan
- 5/2007 Certified Kindergarten Teacher, Regist No. 9600029, the Ministry of Education, Taipei, Taiwan

EXPERIENCES:

Teaching Experience

- 8/2013-Present **ESL instructor**, Institute of Intensive English, Lewis-Clark State College, Lewiston, Idaho, U.S.A.
- 8/2012-5/2013 **ESL instructor**, American Language & Culture Program, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A.
- 1/2011- 5/2013 **Teaching assistant**, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A.
EDCI 302 Teaching Culturally Diverse Learners
ED 584 Intermediate Quantitative Analysis in Education
ED 571 Introduction to Quantitative Research
- 8/2011- 6/2012 **ESL intern**, Moscow High School, Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A.
- 8/2011-1/2012 **ESL intern**, Moscow Middle School, Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A.
- 1/2010-8/2010 **English teacher**, National Cingshuei Senior High School, Taichung, Taiwan
- 9/2006-6/2009 **English teacher**, Le Ye Elementary School, Taichung, Taiwan
- 1/2002-7/2010 **English teacher**, Tiffany English School, Taichung, Taiwan

Professional Development Experience – Delivered

- 8/2012 **Co-facilitator**, Northwest Inland Writing Project’s Invitational Summer Institute, National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan.
- 3/2012 **Workshop presenter**, *Common Errors that EFL Learners Make in English Composition* at Spring Conference 2012 of the Northwest Inland Writing Project, Spokane, Washington, U.S.A.
- Workshop presenter**, *Using Authentic Materials in ESL/EFL Writing class*, at Spring Conference 2012 of the Northwest Inland Writing Project, Spokane, Washington, U.S.A.

Professional Development – Attended

- 3/2013 Spring Conference 2013 of the Northwest Inland Writing Project, Spokane, Washington, U.S.A.
- 10/2012 The Washington State Affiliate of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (WAESOL), Des Moines, Washington, U.S.A.
- 7/2011 Northwest Inland Writing Project’s Invitational Summer Institute, Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, U.S.A.

Other Experience

- 3/2012-3/2013 **Senator**, Graduate and Professional Student Association, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A.
- 10/2011-Present **Leadership advisor**, Northwest Inland Writing Project, Idaho, U.S.A.
- 8/2011-Present **Teacher consultant**, Northwest Inland Writing Project, Idaho, U.S.A.
- 7/2008-7/2009 **International ambassador**, American Language & Culture Program University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A.
- 6/2007-4/2008 **Committee member**, 2008 Youth National Affairs Conference, Minister of National Youth Commission, Taipei, Taiwan
- 9/2005-6/2007 **Student advisor**, Alumni Association, Chaoyang University of Technology, Taichung, Taiwan
- 9/2004-6/2005 **President**, Alumni Association, Chaoyang University of Technology, Taichung, Taiwan
- 9/2003-6/2004 **President**, Student Association, Chaoyang University of Technology, Taichung, Taiwan

SCHOLARLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Publications and Works in Progress

Chu, S.-W., & Duvall, E. Using writer's notebook with adolescent ESL writes. (In preparation)

Chu, S.-W., & Niemela, A. A new adventure on teacher professional development. (In preparation)

Presentations

- 3/2014 Marathon Writers: Helping Students Build Comfort and Self-Reliance in Writing.
- Paper presented at *TESOL 2014 International Convention*. Portland, Oregon, U.S.A.
- 1/2014 Real Pages: Connecting Reading to Action.
- Paper presented at *2014 Hawaii International Conference on Education*. Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A.
- 10/2012 A New Paradigm in ESL Teaching & Learning Environments: Online Professional Development for Taiwanese ESL Instructors.
- Paper presented at *The 4th Asian Conference on Education*, Osaka, Japan.
- 10/2012 Online Professional Development with Teachers of English in Taiwan.
- Team presented lead by Paul Gathercoal and team members included Allen Kitchel, Deanna Gilmore, and Linda Taylor via BbCollaborate to *the Digital Innovation Group's Collaborate Users Group*, Georgia College, Milledgeville, Georgia, U.S.A.
- 2/2012 Using Writer's Notebook with Adolescent ESL Writers.
- Panel presented with Emily Duvall and Monica Hansen at *8th Annual International Globalization, Diversity and Education Conference*. Vancouver, Washington, U.S.A.
- 11/2010 A Study of Multimedia Application on EFL Students' Listening Comprehension.
- Paper presented at *19th International Symposium and Book Fair on English Teaching*. Taipei, Taiwan.
- 1/2010 How Can Linguistically Authentic Materials Enrich EFL Language Learning?
- Paper presented at *2010 Hawaii International Conference on Education*. Honolulu, Hawaii, U.S.A.
- 5/2008 Must Authentic Materials be Used in the EFL Classroom?
- Paper presented at *2008 ELT International Conference: Multicultural Education and Multilingual Learning and Teaching*. Wufeng District, Taichung, Taiwan.

Awarded Grants

- 6/2012 NT\$100,000 from the Ministry of Education in Taiwan for holding “English Instructors’ Professional Development” with April Niemela and Shu-ching Yang, at National Sun Yat-sen University, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. (No. 1010097298h.)
- 11/2012 GPSA Travel Grand Award to Osaka, Japan for presenting at *The 4th Asian Conference on Education* from Graduate and Professional Student Association, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, U.S. A.
- 11/2010 GPSA Travel Grand Award to Honolulu, Hawaii for presenting at *2010 Hawaii International Conference on Education* from Graduate and Professional Student Association, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho, U.S.A.

Professional Development Member

American Educational Research Association (AERA)

The Washington State Affiliate of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (WAESOL)

OTHERS:

Travel

Asia: Japan; China, Thailand, Malaysia

Europe: Prague, Cesky Krumlov, Ceske Budejovice, CZ; Wien, AT; New Castle, London, UK; Holland; Belgium; France; Luxembourg

North America: Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, North Dakota, New York

Languages

Fluency in Mandarin, Taiwanese, and English

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Knowledge of English is perceived as one of the most important tools for establishing Taiwan as the Asian-Pacific center for transportation, management, technology, and humanities” (Lo, 2006, p. 25).

The recent revisions to the Constitution of Taiwan’s education system have initiated a change from the authority of the examination and high test scores, based on a test-oriented pedagogy, to a system that is student-centered and considers a range of formative and summative assessments as well as daily performance, projects, and portfolios. While the Taiwanese curriculum has remained the same, the goal is that delivery of instruction will become more flexible, creative, active, and quality-driven. Even admission to the most desirable secondary schools will become examination-free in 2014, no longer based on high test scores, but only requiring an application, recommendations and a screening test (for class placement), then registration. This transformation in the Taiwanese educational system is changing and challenging the way both Taiwanese students and their teachers view learning and teaching.

In addition, realizing the role and importance of English language learning with regard to achieving global competitiveness, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan had already reorganized the educational system and made English a compulsory subject for all K-12 students, beginning in September 2002 (Government Information Office, 2002). At one time, there were even talks about a possible “bilingualization” plan, which would accelerate

the spread of English as a foreign language (EFL)/ English as a second language (ESL) learning in Taiwan (GIO, 2002). Furthermore, in 2003, the Taiwanese government announced a vision for the future, whereby English would be listed as an official language within eight to ten years (Yu, 2002; Chang, 2002). This plan was developed in order to prepare Taiwan to join the World Trade Organization and improve its international competitiveness. With changes in government language policy, English was expected to become a “semi-official” language in Taiwan by 2008 (MOE, 2008; Tsai, 2010). However, as of 2013, neither bilingualism nor English as a semi-official language has been formalized.

Meanwhile, English proficiency is becoming more and more popular, not only in the general population but also in government; learning English has become a widespread educational objective in Taiwan (Chang, 2002; Chang, 2003; Research, Development and Evaluation Community, 2009, Sun, 2013). However, ever since ESL was integrated into the primary education curriculum, there have been regular reports about the lack of qualified English language teachers, particularly for schools in rural areas (Chan & Huang, 2013; Chern, 2010; Su, 2004; Teng, 2001). The current shortage has also sparked a discussion about job requirements for English teachers and consideration of different options towards certification (GIO, 2002; 2010; Su, 2012).

Not surprisingly, not only is there a demand for qualified teachers, the ongoing changes to the Taiwanese education system and pedagogy suggest that there is also a need for effective professional development. Professional development would allow Taiwanese English language teachers that are currently employed, to incorporate new learning strategies

and techniques in their classrooms in order to improve student learning. As a result, new models of professional development will be needed to address the new knowledge and skill requirements and, potentially, to address the issue of access with regard to time and distance.

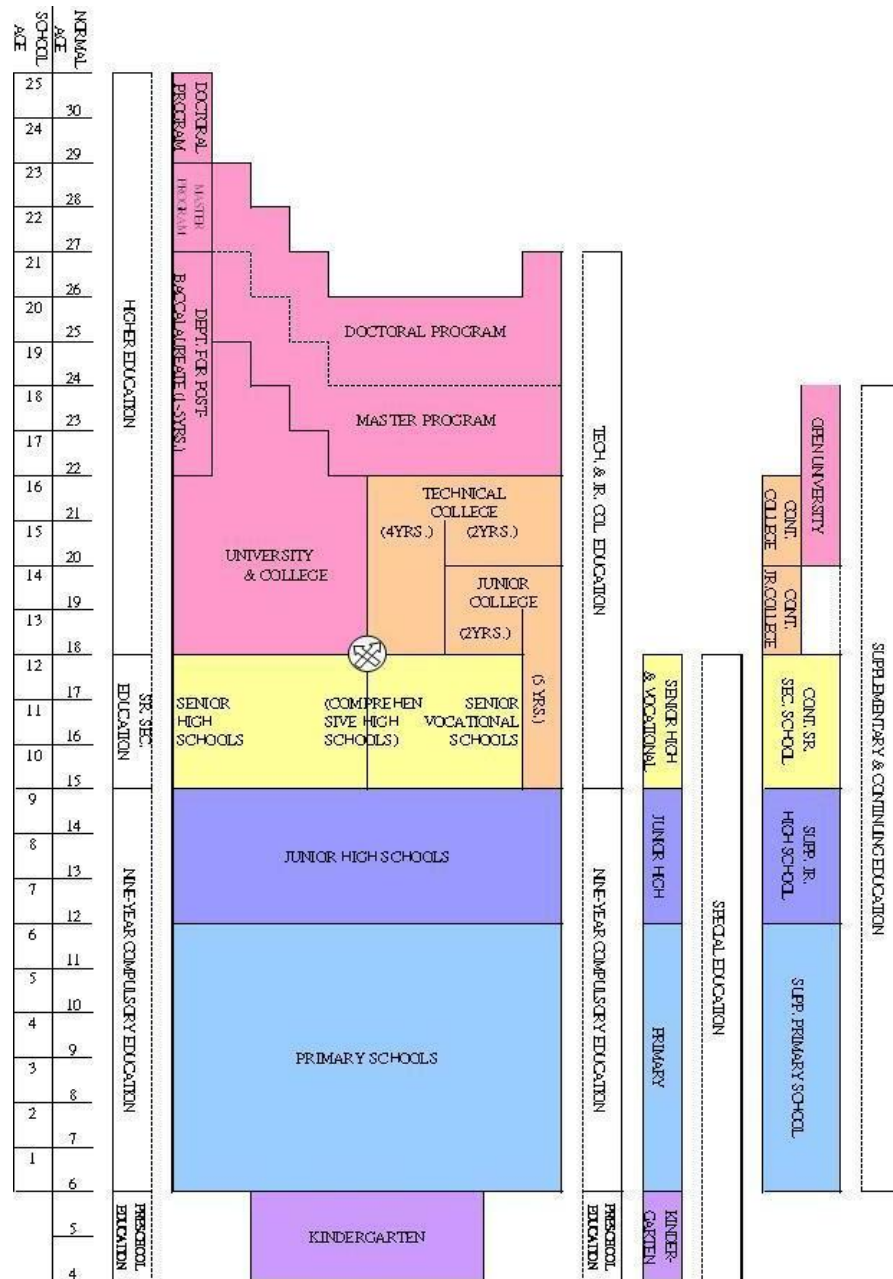
It is the goal of this research to undertake a study of Taiwanese ESL teachers' perspectives with regard to a new, online format of professional development. However, to understand the context for this research study, it is necessary to first review Taiwan's current educational system, the state of English language education in Taiwan, the challenges to English language learning in Taiwan, and professional development in the schools. This chapter considers these issues as well as outlines and discusses the research questions of this study, and concludes with chapter summaries.

Taiwan's Educational System

In 1968, Taiwan put a nine-year Compulsory Education system into effect in which six years were required for primary education and three years for junior high school (MOE, 2012). All schooling was tuition-based and, in addition, to go beyond junior high school students needed to take a rigorous national entrance examination. More recently however, under new legislation, the MOE has begun to re-envision and restructure the organization of the educational system in order to improve the quality of the education environment in Taiwan. As a result, compulsory education will be extended to 12 years in 2014 and renamed the "12-year Basic Education," which will include another three years of senior high school, and students will not be required to pay tuition nor to take national entrance examinations to enroll in either the senior high schools or senior vocational schools (MOE, 2012).

After this obligatory education, students may spend four to seven years in college pursuing a bachelor's degree. Those who are interested in continuing on with graduate studies will spend two to four years on a master's degree program, while a doctoral program usually takes three to seven additional years to complete, as shown in Figure 1 (MOE, 2012).

Figure 1: Taiwan's Current System of Schoolings (MOE, 2012)



Up until this time, students who wanted to pursue a bachelor's degree had to attend a regular senior high school while those who were enrolled in a senior vocational school or a five-year junior college program rarely had an opportunity to study in higher education. As of mid 2013, though, the MOE accepted a framework that now allows for alternative routes for Taiwanese students to pursue higher education. As a result, instead of going to a regular senior high school, students who study in a senior vocational school can also pursue bachelor's degrees from a four-year technical colleges or universities. In addition, students who choose the five-year junior college program, which they enter right after junior high, may now continue their studies for two additional years and go on to earn their bachelor's degree.

Regardless of the road taken, moving into post-secondary education in Taiwan currently requires not only passing strict national entrance examinations, but also earning high enough grades at school to qualify a student for enrollment in a national college or university. As a result, the system still places a huge emphasis on examinations, which creates an extremely competitive environment among students in secondary levels for entering the best college or university.

Confucianism

Taiwan's education is also affected by Confucianism. Confucianism is a major cultural influence in many Asian societies, including those of Taiwan, China, South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (Kim, 2007; MOE, 2012). The core values of Confucianism guiding Chinese-influenced societies include morality, filial piety, interpersonal harmony, collective

decision-making, good manners, and the importance of education (Kim, 2007; Zhang, 2000). The Confucian philosophy of education is based on the idea of “providing education for all people without discrimination” (Confucius, 551BC- 479 BC) and it thoroughly prioritizes the teaching of ethics. Thus, the purpose of education is to help people develop an ideal personality and, through the educational system, virtues with regard to one’s role in life (Chan, 1999; Hwang, 2001; Zhang, 2000). That is to say, Confucianism has positively influenced Chinese societies in that people are still highly motivated to acquire a good education, including degrees and diplomas. This pursuit of education represents an essential component of virtue, the moral dimension of Confucianism that speaks to the development of the individual as a good member of society. In addition, a high-quality educational background not only establishes a person’s reputation and academic achievement, but also leads him or her to become a leader rather than merely an expert in some area of technical or professional competence. When a person earns the highest degree, such as a doctoral degree, then that person brings enormous honor to the whole family. By contrast, when a student exhibits low academic achievement, the student and his or her whole family feel they have become humiliated.

More specifically, Confucianism favors an intellectual approach to education and supports learning through diligence, progression, perseverance, and discipline (GIO, 2010), while fun and games are frowned upon (Hwang, 2001; Kim, 2007). In addition, Taiwanese parents not only believe that good grades come from hard work, effort, diligence, endurance, and persistence (Chang, 2008; Haynes & Chalker, 1998; Hwang, 2001), but also place high

value on school achievement (Chan, 1999; Chang, 2008; Kim, 2007; Zhang, 2000). They engage their children in learning, support their schools, and are willing to put almost all their resources toward their children's education, including money, time, and energy. As a result, most children in Taiwan begin their education from a young age, sometimes as early as two years old, and many of them are able to read and write before they begin primary school (Chan, 1999; Chang, 2008).

However, the influence of Confucian ideals includes the belief that the only way for a leader to civilize the people and establish good social customs is through education (Zhai & Woodberry, 2011). As a result, since ancient times, education has focused on studying and memorizing the Confucian Texts, the Four Books and the Five Classics, in order to pass comprehensive examinations that would prove that one is educated enough to become a government leader (Ark, 2013; Zhao, 2007). Consequently, the principles of Confucianism have come to incorporate an emphasis on examinations. Therefore, historically, education in Taiwan should be understood within the context of a pedagogy traditionally based on methods that support impeccable recall such as memorization, repetition, rote learning, and teacher-centered instruction (Chang, 2004; Hwang, 2001). Not surprisingly this has extended into other subject matters such as learning to read and write where students are expected to focus on drills, practicing letter names, letter sounds, spelling rules, and writing order, rather than critical thinking, personal opinions, meaning in context, reflection, and reading comprehension (Chang, 2006; Yao, 1999).

To be fair, it is unclear whether this approach to teaching and learning can be claimed to be consistent with Confucian ideals. However, what is certain is that this approach to teaching and learning has been reinforced by intense competition for limited places in high-quality institutes, such as public senior high schools or national colleges/universities (Hwang, 2001; Kim, 2007; Lai, 2008; Lo, 2006). One consequence has been the emergence of costly private “cram schools” where Taiwanese students continue their studies after regular school hours, with primary school students receiving instruction in their homework while junior and senior high school students receive additional preparation for competitive national entrance exams. As a result, with the inclusion of homework, most Taiwanese students spend up to 16 hours each day on school-based activities (Chang, 2008; Chou & Ho, 2007; Lai, 2008; Lee, 2008; Zhang, 2000). Therefore, from early childhood on, students do not have time to play nor do parents consider childhood as a time when children should play, but rather see it as a period that children should devote to their educational development in both formal (e.g., kindergarten, primary school, secondary school) and informal (e.g., cram school) environments.

It is not surprising that in Taiwan parents commonly take an active role in their children’s education and pay close attention to their grades, school performance, and teachers. To make sure their children perform well in school and get full marks on exams, parents set high standards in evaluating a teacher’s educational background, teaching experience, and teaching outcomes (Chang, 2008; Lee, 2008; Li, Wang, & Yao, 2008; Pratt, Lai, & Munro, 2001). That is to say, most Taiwanese parents rate the quality of a teacher

according to how well the teacher can help their children get good grades on important exams. As a result, teacher professional development would appear to be extremely important with regard to improving the quality of teachers, by providing them with tools to be more effective in the classroom (Galanouli, Murphy, & Gardner, 2003; Mann, 2005; Yeh, 2007).

English Language Education in Taiwan

The growing interest in learning English in Taiwan has been stimulated by globalization and the government's role in pushing for an educational system that prepares the Taiwanese for global competitiveness. In 1993, only a few primary schools in Taiwan offered English courses and these were experimental teaching programs for students in the fifth or sixth grade. However, by the end of 1996, many primary schools began English classes as part of the regular curriculum (Chen, 1996; Lin, 1996; Shih, 2001). According to Chen's survey (1996), 83% of all sixth graders in primary schools in the capital city of Taipei took English classes, and more than 80% of primary school students joined English cram schools after school. By the academic year of 1997-98, 21.1% of primary schools offered English classes in the school curriculum (Lin, 1996; Shih, 2001). Urban cities such as Taipei, Taichung, and Tainan, which have an abundance of teaching resources and funding, began offering English in primary schools, and by 1998 more than 93% of primary schools in Taipei (i.e., 138 schools) offered English courses (Wu, 2001). Yet, while English language education in Taiwan seems to be spreading throughout the entire nation of Taiwan, there are clear differences between growth in urban cities and rural areas.

In 2001, the MOE introduced the Grade 1-9 Curriculum. These new guidelines more closely connected the primary curriculum to the junior high school curriculum (Chern, 2010; Dai, 2002; MOE, 2001; Wu, 2001). They were also written so as to encourage teachers to respect and address students' multiple intelligences and different learning styles, all of which was meant to support students in developing a basic competency in English communication (Chao, Lo, & Yeh, 2006; Chen, 2006; Zhan, 2000). The guidelines contain seven core competencies in English: listening, speaking, reading, writing, comprehension ability, motivation and interest, and culture and custom, which are not only used for school-based curriculum and teaching syllabi, but also for reference in textbook design (MOE, 2003).

In 2005, in alignment with the idea that "earlier is better", the MOE decided to lower the grade for beginning a compulsory English curriculum to the third grade (Chan, 2006; Chen & Tsai, 2012; Chern, 2010). In some cases, according to Tsao (2008), English has been introduced at even lower grade levels. For example, Taipei Times (2003) reported that at least 17 of 25 cities and counties in Taiwan have begun English education for first graders. It is worth notice, it has been the strong demand on the part of parents for students to learn English as early as possible that has driven local school authorities to begin English education programs in first grade or even in kindergarten (Chan, 2006; Chang, 2003; Chang, 2008; Chern, 2010). Indeed, English learning has become an essential criterion for parents' selection of kindergarten or private schools since the 1990's (Lai, 2008, p. 236). Not surprising, this suggests a strong demand for excellent English language teachers.

English teacher education

For many decades, teacher education was the responsibility of teachers' colleges alone. However, with the passage of the *Teacher Professional Development Law: Teacher Training Act* in 1994, teacher education in Taiwan has been restructured. The MOE approved 16 universities as providers of teacher training programs or centers for teacher education at all levels: from kindergarten to the secondary level (MOE, 1994). These schools offer potential candidates, who major in English as pre-service teachers, the opportunity to enroll in an EFL/ESL teacher education course. Course credits then can be applied to their official teacher certification program (MOE, 2012).

However, potential candidates who hope to become English instructors in public schools at the primary, junior high, and senior high levels may want to pass an English proficiency exam. That is, they may choose to take the TOEFL or the advanced level of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) which, when compared to the TOEFL, requires a much higher passing score (Language Training & Testing Center, 2012). Some teachers may not choose to take the GEPT or TOEFL as they have demonstrated their English teaching ability in an alternate way. This is perfectly acceptable according to a policy revised by the MOE in 2012. That is, potential candidates may provide test scores from other English proficiency tests. For example, a candidate might choose to offer scores from the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and Cambridge ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages). The requirement would be to demonstrate scores that could be considered equal to or greater

than a B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR). That is, the potential candidates would be demonstrating their ability to understand, to discuss, and to produce clear ideas and opinions on topics and issues in English, as well as their ability to interact fluently with native English speakers (CEFR, 2001).

Prospective teachers are also required to complete either 40 credits for primary school or 26 credits of education courses for both kindergarten and secondary school levels in a teacher training program/center for teacher education approved by the MOE. Subsequently, they must complete a six-month practicum and then pass the annual teacher certification assessment. The certification test is held by the MOE every April. Those who pass are awarded teaching certification from the MOE. Only candidates who have obtained this certification are eligible to participate in the screening tests held by local governments for positions in teaching and administration at the secondary, primary, and kindergarten levels (MOE, 2012). Thus, possession of a teaching certificate does not guarantee that a teaching placement will be available for a qualified teacher.

However, in Chinese-based societies teachers are highly respected and people choose to become teachers to bring honor to their ancestors (Fwu & Wang, 2002; Hwang, 2001) and attain high social status (Chen & Tsai, 2012; Fwu & Hwang, 2002; Huang, 2008). In addition, most of the qualified teachers hope to serve in a public school in order to secure a good and stable teaching salary (Su, 2012; Wang & Fwu, 2002), with stable work hours (Chan, 1999; Chen, 2008). Generally, they also would prefer to teach in urban areas and look

forward to the promise of students with high achievement ability (Chen, 1999; Su, 2012). Unfortunately, job vacancies within the K-12 system are limited. The average acceptance rate, based on the screening tests, was approximately 1.5% to 2% during 2009-2011 and, in 2012, according to the MOE, there were nearly 100,000 qualified teachers who did not have a permanent position, (MOE, 2012). Such low acceptance rates have lead qualified English teachers to change their careers or become teachers without regular jobs, substitute teachers, annual-contract teachers, roaming teachers, or cram school teachers in privately-owned schools (Chen & Tsai, 2012; Liaw, 2009; Su, 2012; Wang & Fwu, 2002). Yet these qualified teachers are unwilling to teach in rural areas because life there is considered inconvenient (Chen & Tsai, 2012; Chan, Huang, & Lin, 2013; Su, 2004), and working hours and teaching loads are inconsistent (Chen, 2008; Chen & Chang, 2008; Su, 2012).

Challenges to English language education in Taiwan

In the Grade 1-9 English Curriculum, English education has three main goals (MOE, 2001): (a) to develop students' basic communication skills in English, (b) to cultivate students' interest in English and in effective learning methods, and (c) to introduce foreign cultures to students as well as to deepen awareness of their local culture. However, the new curriculum has created tremendous challenges for English teachers in Taiwan. Liaw (2009) pointed out that the new English education policy in primary schools has created a situation in which there are huge discrepancies in implementation across the range of educational environments in Taiwan due to the quality of teachers, pedagogies, curriculum goals, and educational materials. For example, various versions of English textbooks have created

problems in curriculum uniformity (Chao et al., 2006; Chang, 2004; Shih, 2001). In addition, insufficient class time and large class sizes pose difficulties for teachers with regard to meeting the guidelines for the Grade 1-9 English curriculum, and this is further impacted by the range in the levels of English proficiency of students who are in the same classroom (Chen & Tsai, 2012; Chen, 2006; Hsieh, 2011; Liaw, 2009). On top of this, Taiwan has also continued to experience issues with regard to rural schooling where English teaching resources including qualified English teachers, in-class technology equipment, and school supplies are deficient compared to more urban settings.

The quality of English teachers

The challenge emerged in 2001 when the Grade 1-9 Curriculum was first introduced: the MOE announced that there would be two paths toward becoming a qualified English teacher in primary schools. The first path required taking courses in a teacher training program or center for teacher education at a university, passing the teacher certification assessment, and earning a teaching certificate. Participants majored in English, English Literature, Applied Foreign Languages, and would have already obtained a college degree before applying for this option. The second path was through recruitment as a current primary school teacher who was willing to teach English. These teachers were given a short-term English program to prepare them for teaching English to their students. However, English teachers who have qualified by taking the second path are criticized for having insufficient training. Yet, it appears that up to 60% of English teachers become qualified through this second path. According to the MOE (2012), every year between 30% and 40%

of teachers finish the pre-service training program and get teaching certification through the first path, and even though cultivating teachers using the first path is more time-consuming, it produces the best qualified English teachers (Chen, 2006; Liaw, 2009; Liou, 2001; Wu, 2001). Thus, the quality of English teaching is uneven because of the two very different ways to qualify. This remains an issue to be addressed.

English teaching styles, approaches, and materials

In connection with the quality of English teaching, one controversial issue is that Taiwanese English language teachers continue to use their native language (Chinese) while teaching (Freundl, 2004). In a typical Taiwanese teacher-centered classroom, most lessons are delivered by a Taiwanese English teacher as a lecture leaving no room for student participation (Chen & Tsai, 2012; Chern, 2010; Cross & Hitchcock, 2007; Hill, 2009; Hsieh, 2011; Kao & Tsai, 2009; Wu, 2001). In addition, as Chen and Tsai (2012) have pointed out, most English teachers in Taiwan are unfamiliar with teaching concepts found in a variety of English teaching pedagogies, such as critical thinking, collaborative learning, interactive activities, and creative writing. Instead, most focus on teaching strategies for finding the right answers to questions on English tests or exams.

Thus, English language teachers at all levels are focused on preparing students for exams rather than on listening and speaking proficiencies as “testing-led teaching” has permeated the educational system in Taiwan (Chen & Tsai, 2012; Hsieh, 2011; Hwang, 2005). More specifically, Hwang (2005) indicated that while Taiwanese English language teachers are highly regarded for their ability to interpret English grammar rules (p. 2), the

consequence is that Taiwanese students are taught primarily by grammar-driven English lessons with multiple-choice assessments. Not surprisingly, students lose interest in learning and using English, as well developing their speaking and listening competencies (Cross & Hitchcock, 2007; Hwang, 2005; Tsai, 2002; Wong, 2004). As a result, there is a tendency for lower proficiency students to give up learning English in an early stage (Chang, 2006; Lin, 2009; Taso, 2001).

It is also worth noting that the teaching and learning materials used in the classroom are especially problematic since many of them are written and published by local or in-house publishers and often contain lexical and syntactical errors (Chan, 2005; Chang, 2004). Furthermore, it seems that the quality of materials varies considerably depending on the school and teacher. With regard to the Grade 1-9 English Curriculum, teachers themselves are encouraged to develop a variety of teaching materials and activities consistent with the school-based curriculum. As a result, high-quality schools (e.g., private schools) and highly regarded teachers often find they need to write their own teaching curriculum, and produce their own textbooks and learning materials, to provide the best for their students (Chang, 2004; Hsieh, 2011). And while many teachers may not have the ability to do this, as with all teachers, Taiwanese teachers want to do their jobs well. Thus, teachers are often eager for opportunities to build their professional knowledge in order to go beyond the limits of textbook teaching and the restriction of giving only lectures (Chen & Tsai, 2012; Liaw, 2009; Lo, 2006; Tsai, 2010).

English education in rural areas

In many rural areas there is a shortage of English teaching resources, a lack of qualified English language teachers, and sometimes even the need for an actual classroom (Chan & Huang, 2013; Chen & Chang, 2008; Hwang, 2008; Su, 2004). What is more, faulty multimedia equipment such as computers and videos, as well as poor Internet availability are problematic and limit both teachers' and students' opportunities to access educational resources in rural areas (Hwang, 2008).

Rural schooling also has to contend with demands for public transportation connecting cities to rural areas. The public transportation system not only restricts the number of teachers who are willing to work in there, but also decreases the availability of professional development opportunities for teachers. Yet, there are strict standards for foreign teachers who otherwise might be interested in working in rural areas. With regard to these restrictions and limited funds there has been ongoing concern regarding the quality of both teaching and learning in rural schools (Chan & Chang, 2008; Chan & Huang, 2013; Su, 2004).

Forest schools are one example of questionable teaching and learning. A limited budget may mean that, in some cases, there is no building available so classes are held outdoors (Hwang, 2008). Even indoor classrooms may have only desks, chairs, perhaps a blackboard, but no additional classroom resources (Chen & Chang, 2008). In some cases, two or more students must use the same desk (Hwang, 2008). Further, in rural school areas, both parents and students may not be all that concerned about learning outcomes or grades.

As a result, however, these students may engage in other activities rather than listening to the teachers' lectures. In this situation, it is a challenge for the teachers to give a formal lesson or conduct academic activities.

Not surprisingly, it is harder for teachers in rural areas to improve their professional teaching knowledge, skills, and abilities as they heavily depend on insufficient public transportation. That is to say, the teachers rarely have the opportunity to continue attending professional development programs in urban cities (Chen & Chang, 2008; Hwang, 2008; Su, 2004). Thus, these teachers seem to design and plan the courses alone and become isolated in their teaching environment.

Professional Development in the Schools

According to Hwang (2005), the struggles of both the English language teacher and the English language learner might best be addressed by providing teachers with qualified and practical professional development. However, professional development for Taiwanese English language teachers varies from school to school. In some schools, teachers attend half-day or one-day workshops held by textbook publishers. According to Lee (2008), the number of teacher training courses offered by textbook publishers is steadily increasing. The textbook publishers invite well-known authors of English language teaching (ELT) materials to conduct these workshops, but such events, aside from the fact that they charge a fee, are mainly used by publishers to sell and promote their textbooks and other teaching materials (Chan, 2006; Chao et al., 2006; Chen & Tsai, 2012; Tseng, 2003; Yeh, 2007).

Thus, even though many English teachers have had opportunities to be involved in a wide variety of professional development activities, these activities have not been incorporated into the formal structure of teacher education programs, primary schools, and secondary schools for the purposes of licensure, certification, promotion, and continuing education. That is, the training activities have been delivered in lecture format, and the topics or contexts may not be directly connected to English language course design, teaching methods, pedagogical content knowledge, or course materials (Chen, 2001; Kao & Tsai, 2009; Yang & Liu, 2004). As a result, there is a need to support in-service English language teachers to continue learning and improving their professional knowledge, skills, and abilities (Chao et al., 2006; Chen, 2001; Yang & Liu, 2004; Yeh, 2007). Specifically needed are professional development courses aimed at assisting teachers in increasing their students' learning motivation and in changing current practice in Taiwanese English language classrooms.

Research Study

The challenge for the Taiwanese English language teacher involves not only getting a good teacher education; it also involves finding ways to engage in relevant professional development opportunities. Studies in recent years have mostly concerned with how effective the teaching strategies, techniques, and methodologies have been portended in Taiwanese English classes (Chang, 2011; Chen & Tsai, 2012; Chou, 2012; Gu, 2003; Hwang, 2005; Kao, Carlin, & Hsu, 2011; Lai, 2009; Li, 2004; Liao, 2007; Liaw, 2009; Liu & Chu, 2010; Lu, Lou, Papa, & Chung, 2011; Wang, 2010; Xia, 2005; Zhou, 2002). Research in these areas has

included teaching English to young learners (Chan, 2005; Chang, 2012; Huang, 2011; Shang & Wang, 2010), using games and activities in teaching English skills (Chen & Tsai, 2012; Chou, 2012; Liao, 2007; Liu & Chu, 2010; Lu et al., 2011; Wang, 2010), coping with learners' English learning anxiety (Chang, 2008; Kao & Craigie, 2010; Liu, 2006; Liu, 2012; Zhao, 2007; Zheng, 2003; Zheng, 2008), and providing students with the motivation to learn English (Cheng & Cheng, 2012; Cheng & Dornyei, 2007; Hsu, 2010; Li & Pan, 2009; Pan, Zang, & Wu, 2010). Yet, the topics and the designs of most studies have been not only decided by professors and graduate students in universities, but also focused on their research interests. That is to say, most of the studies have not addressed English language teachers' needs and interests in their classes.

In addition, there are few published research studies on what could be termed as in-service professional development for Taiwanese English language teachers. These few studies, either mix-methods or quantitative in nature, cover: reflective practice in pre-service teacher education programs for high school teachers (Liou, 2001), pre-service teacher' beliefs and self-efficacy (Liaw, 2009), a knowledge sharing behavior model for junior high school teachers (Shih & Lou, 2011), online learning environments for private language supplementary schools (Dela Cruz-Yeh, 2011), and general education teachers' attitudes towards online professional development (Kao & Tsai, 2009; Yang & Liu, 2004). In other words, there are no studies that specifically address the needs of English language instructors.

To address this gap in the research, this study centers on the needs of Taiwanese English language teachers and how a web-based professional development course approach could be used to address these needs. More specifically, the study focuses on Taiwanese ESL teachers' perspectives on participating in an online professional development course (OPDC).

The goal of the study is to convey Taiwanese ESL teachers' perspectives on engaging in different types of activities in the OPDC environment. The overarching research question that directs this study is:

What are Taiwanese ESL teachers' perspectives on participating in an online professional development setting?

In order to address this question the following sub-questions are considered:

1. How might an online professional development course address the learning needs and interests of Taiwanese ESL teachers?
2. How might an online professional development course impact Taiwanese ESL teachers' classroom practice?
3. How might information and communications technologies (ICTs) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) be leveraged to facilitate collaborative professional development activities for Taiwanese ESL teachers in an online professional development setting?
4. What might Taiwanese ESL teachers' motivations be to sustain an online professional development course?

The approach being taken to allow for this investigation is via the formation of an online community for Taiwanese ESL teachers in which they have the opportunity to ask for what they need professionally and then to provide this professional development through online activities. Ultimately, the study is meant to create a model for teachers' professional development that addresses autonomy as well as on-going professional development for English language teachers.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter one presents an introduction to the research context including a brief orientation to Taiwan's educational system, the state of English learning environments in Taiwan, the challenges to English language learning in Taiwan, and the delivery of professional development. Research questions are also presented.

Chapter two provides a literature review and discussion of the relevant theories involved in teachers' professional development. This chapter considers the features of effective professional development and the shortcomings of traditional professional development. Included is a discussion of online professional development that integrates information and communications technologies (ICTs) as well as computer-mediated communication (CMC) into the learning system. Lastly, the chapter discusses sociocultural theory and the social constructivist model of transformative learning theory as it applies to a teachers' professional development community.

Chapter three focuses on a discussion of the research methodology used for this study, which includes a discussion of the qualitative research method along with data

collection and data analysis. The chapter also reviews the method of triangulation whereby data was gathered from four sources: one-to-one face-to-face interviews, pre- and post-questionnaires, electronic documentation of participation, and field notes.

Chapter four presents the findings of the research. These include the contexts of the study: the change from a face-to-face to an online professional development course, the online professional development course itself, and the teacher-participants'. Thick, rich description is used to highlight the backgrounds of the four teacher-participants and the emerging themes and concerns are also revealed.

Chapter five provides a discussion of the research, the contributions to various fields, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Traditionally, professional development involves formal training activities provided in single or half-day workshop sessions led by an expert or experienced teacher (Richter et al., 2011; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Yang & Liu, 2004). The shortcomings of the traditional method of delivery include the time and money required to travel to the site (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Galanouli et al., 2003), and the difficulty of trying to keep teacher training current in disciplines such as language teaching, where knowledge and practice evolve rapidly (Guskey, 2002; Rao, 2003; Yang & Liu, 2004). Furthermore, these professional development activities are often lacking in focus and do not provide enough depth in any one particular area of teaching (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Yang & Liu, 2004).

Learning communities, however, have been used effectively to promote thoughtful educational practice by allowing teachers to engage in discourse with teacher educators and other teaching professionals in a safe and trustworthy environment (Allan & Miller, 1990; Trewern & Lai, 2001; Wald & Castleberry, 2000). Such communities help to develop norms of collegiality and collaborative problem-solving, and promote the growth of reflective discussion (Abdullah & Jacobs, 2004; Edge, 2002; Huffman & Kalnin, 2003; Maor, 2003; Suthers, 2001). The benefits of a learning community for novice teachers include collaborating with experienced teachers, working with experts, using various teaching resources, and sharing, exploring and learning as part of a social apprenticeship network. The

social apprenticeship network includes mediated professional development activities led by more knowledgeable others, and involving modeling, coaching, reflection, and exploration (Allan & Miller, 1990; Mann, 2005; Pratt et al., 2001). As a result, in a teacher learning community, all the participants - inexperienced teachers, experienced teachers, and experts alike - engage in reflective and critical thinking about teaching and learning pedagogies.

Along with taking advantage of increased Internet access, many institutions use technological tools, such as information and communications technologies (ICTs), to develop and create accessible professional learning and training activities for teachers. With the advance of ICTs and the growth of interest in e-learning, many institutions are currently offering online programs that use a range of computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools, such as e-mail, bulletin boards, online chat rooms, blogs, Blackboard Collaborate, Skype, Wiki, Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo! Messenger and so forth (Haythornthwaite & Andrew, 2011; LaPointe, 2007; Lock, 2006; Kamthi-Stein, 2000; Manner & Rodriguez, 2012; Stepien, 2000; Trewern & Lai, 2001; Yang & Liu, 2004). As a result, web-based technological tools provide possibilities for innovative teacher professional development. These online professional development communities not only help individual teachers to develop their professional knowledge, skills and abilities (Abdullah & Jacobs, 2004; Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Kamthi-Stein, 2000; Marrero, Woodruff, & Schuster, 2010; Yang & Liu, 2004), but also offer teachers great flexibility in choosing training times and places of training (Hewett & Ehmman, 2004; Johnson & Golombek, 2003).

In order to create an online professional development opportunity for Taiwanese English language teachers, it is important to review prior research studies which are related to this field. This literature review explores traditional teacher professional development, weaknesses in traditional teacher professional development, the importance of ongoing learning opportunities for teachers, the features of effective professional development, the teacher learning community, the collaborative online learning community, online professional development, and the growing popularity of ICTs and CMC in creating professional development communities for teachers. A discussion of the theoretical framework concludes the chapter.

Traditional Teacher Professional Development

Teacher professional development refers to formally organized attempts to provide more knowledge, skills, and pedagogies to in-service teachers, as well as improve the overall quality of education (Chao et al., 2006; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Lange, 1990; Tseng, 2003; Yang & Liu, 2004; Yeh, 2007; Zhan, 2000). One model of teacher professional development training is the transmission model (Freire, 1993; Kumaravadivelu, 2001), in which outside experts transmit their intended knowledge to the audience. From this perspective, knowledge-acquisition is a passive, automated response to an external stimulus (Freire, 1993; Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Mann, 2005; Tseng, 2003; Yang & Liu, 2004; Zhan, 2000).

Teacher professional development, as mandated by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan, is based on the transmission model with delivery methods including “sit-and-get”

training sessions, one-time-only workshops, school-based seminars, local and national conferences (Tseng, 2003; Yang & Liu, 2004; Yeh, 2007; Zhan, 2000). A lecture is the prevalent method for delivering, or transmitting, the prearranged knowledge, which puts teachers solely in the role of knowledge receivers (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Richter et al., 2011; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Yang & Liu, 2004). Workshops or events that have been more systematically planned around relevant topics may last longer than two days, but occur only on an occasional basis (Hill, 2009; Richter et al., 2011; Yeh, 2007). In any case, the effectiveness of these professional development activities/courses/programs is questionable (Chao et al., 2006; Guskey, 2002; Tseng, 2003; Yang & Liu, 2004).

Issues with traditional professional development

As mentioned, traditional professional development training takes the form of seminars, conferences, or workshops and usually involves large groups of participants. Guskey (2002) argued that such programs have been less than successful. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, and Yoon (2001) noted, traditional professional development trainings are widely criticized as being ineffective in providing teachers with sufficient time, activities, and content necessary for increasing teachers' knowledge and fostering meaningful changes (p. 920). Thus, in many cases, such professional development activities/courses/programs become isolated trainings or workshop events where the content or focus of learning is not connected to the teachers' needs, interests, and practices.

Since the form and content as well as space and time arrangements for traditional professional development trainings are usually designed by government authorities or

researchers, they are considered to be top-down models (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Leahy & William, 2009; Tseng, 2003). In a top-down model, teachers have no autonomy to decide what they plan to learn and how they intend to learn it (Bailey et al., 2001; Guskey, 2000; Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Liang, 2002; Liaw, 2009). To have enough teachers attending workshops, the education authority mandates all schools to send a certain number of teachers to attend the workshop (Ou, 1996; Tseng, 2003; Yeh, 2007; Zhan, 2000). To be fair, some schools in Taiwan create policies which allow for teachers to take turns attending the workshops, but this neglects specific teachers' needs and interests (Liaw, 2009; Shih, 2001; Tseng, 2003; Yang & Liu, 2004; Zhan, 2000). As a result, teachers may act as passive learners with little motivation to study what has been arranged for them.

The mismatch between training programs and teachers' needs results in teachers' cold and indifferent attitudes towards professional development trainings (Chao et al., 2006; Chen & Tsai, 2012; Guskey, 2000; Richter et al., 2011; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2006; Yeh, 2007). Only chance determines whether teachers attend useful workshops and acquire relative practical teaching knowledge and skills or lose confidence and interest in future in-service training courses. That is, forcing adults to join training programs without consulting them is ineffective and could be considered of a waste of time and money.

Additionally, the time allotted to traditional professional development trainings is inadequate. A lecture may last for one or two hours, and no follow-up activities are provided to examine teachers' application of the training after their attendance at training sessions. In these "one-shot" workshops, teachers do not have sufficient time to practice what they are

expected to have learned (Daloglu, 2004; Hill, 2009; Rao, 2003; Tseng, 2003). Consequently, teachers soon discard lecture content without practicing it at all, so they obtain little or no benefits from these programs in the way of professional growth (Garet et al., 2001; Ou, 1996; Rao, 2003). Although such trainings may be simple, since large numbers of teachers are physically present at the conference and are receiving the same information, the lack of relevance and practicality of such professional development training can be disappointing for teachers (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Daloglu, 2004; Richter et al., 2011; Tseng, 2003; Zhan, 2000).

Most teachers disdain knowledge transmitted by experts as meaningless and ineffective because they are usually researchers, educators, or scholars who have spent little time in a primary or secondary school classroom. Often the content of lectures is based on the expert's knowledge, which is usually not sufficiently sensitive to the internal culture of school teachers (Avalos, 2011; Guskey, 2000; McCarney, 2004; Rao, 2003; Sandholtz, 2002). These top-down approaches to professional development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Leahy & William, 2009; Tseng, 2003), based on the transmission model (Freire, 1993; Kumaravadivelu, 2001), may not only de-motivate teachers but actually lead to resistance to change in the areas of teaching behaviors and beliefs (Hoven, 2006; Huang, 2007; Ou, 1996; Tseng, 2003; Yeh, 2007; Zhan, 2000).

Theories or principles are transmitted to teachers based on the assumption that they lack certain teaching skills and knowledge and therefore need to be educated (Avalos, 2011; Guskey, 2000; Hill, 2009; Liang, 2002; Rao, 2003; Richter et al., 2011). Thus, teachers are

expected to learn the knowledge delivered by the training programs in order to improve their teaching quality (Burbank & Kauchak; 2003; Chao et al., 2006; Chen, 2001; Hill, 2009; Johnson & Colombek, 2003; Liang, 2002; Rao, 2003; Shih, 2001). But top-down, transmission-based training programs (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Freire, 1993; Leahy & William, 2009; Tseng, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 2001) do not help teachers bridge the gap between theory and practice. McCarney (2004) supported this notion, saying:

The perceived needs of teachers and their actual needs can be seriously mismatched...many education authorities and schools have reacted to the need for staff development without fully taking account of the purposes of the in-service offered and the actual needs of their teacher.” (p. 65)

The quality of professional development influences the quality of teaching, and the quality of teaching determines the outcome of students’ learning. Shih (2001) claimed that teachers’ education is never really completed, but rather is developed and reshaped continuously. It is an ongoing process, which requires teachers to take part in learning throughout their teaching career. According to John Dewey (1916), knowledge and experience are always the starting point of an educational process, never the result. Therefore, it is important to provide teachers learning opportunities and to support them as lifelong learners.

Similarly, one aspect of professional development for teachers was proposed by Peyton (1997), who stated that “Regardless of the skills and knowledge that language teachers possess when they commence teaching, maintenance and improvement must be an ongoing process” (p.4). Recently, researchers and educators have stepped up their

exploration of more efficient professional development programs to address the high demand for English language teacher professional development (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Chao et al., 2006; Diaz-Maggioli, 2003; Hill, 2009; Liang, 2001; Shih, 2001; Shih & Lou, 2011; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Yeh, 2007).

The Importance of Ongoing Learning Opportunities for Teachers

Teacher professional development has been referred to as the “process of continual intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth of teachers...[so that] teachers continue to evolve in the use, adaptation, and application of their art and craft” (Lange, 1990, p. 250).

Darling-Hammond (2005) contended that professional development should be ongoing and embedded into teachers’ daily teaching practices if it is to be effective and improve instruction. In addition, teachers’ professional growth requires long-term training, involves theory as a background to practice, is characterized by a high degree of autonomy, and fosters an individual code of behaviors (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Shih, 2001).

Guskey (2000) described professional development as a series of processes and activities, which include formal and informal workshops, designed to enhance the professional knowledge, teaching techniques, beliefs, attitudes, and efficacy of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students (p.16). In other words, the ultimate goal of attending professional development is to improve students’ learning outcomes by putting innovation into practice and encouraging teachers to become lifelong learners. Indeed, it has been documented that teachers’ professional development has a strong correlation with students’ learning achievements (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Diaz-Maggioli,

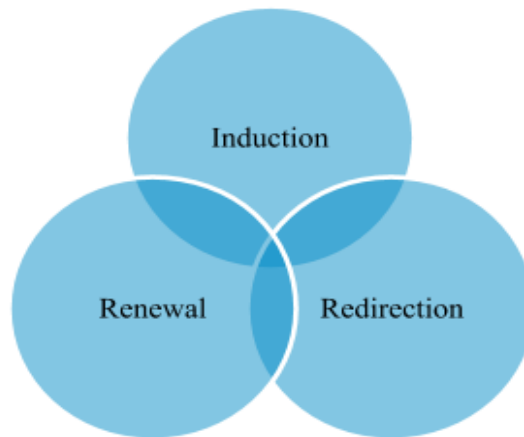
2003; Li et al., 2008; Simonson et al., 2006; Pratt et al., 2001). However, in the recent past, teachers were criticized by many people for teaching students old knowledge and ways of doing things instead of helping them to face the challenges of an unpredictable future (Rao, 2003; Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Chao et al., 2006; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Peyton, 1997; Wu, 2001; Zhan, 2000).

The divisions and dimensions of professional development

There are four divisions to professional development: (a) preparation, (b) induction, (c) renewal, and (d) redirection (Burke, 1987; Ou, 1996). The preparation period refers to necessary pre-service teacher education, whereas induction, renewal, and redirection are the emphasis for in-service teacher training. With regard to the focus of this research study, the preparation period is not discussed. That is, after induction, in-service teachers are expected to advance their professional development through education, or renewal, and application, or redirection.

The renewal period involves overcoming the limitations of old methods and adding new designs to make teaching more creative. Successful renewal should also include variation, which is the key to professional development (Ou, 1996). Redirection involves continually revisiting teaching objectives, increasing student engagement in activities, sparking students' motivation to learn, and developing teaching skills that can be applied to new learning tasks. The influences of induction, renewal, and redirection reinforce one another. Figure 2 illustrates how all three divisions work together to drive professional development.

Figure 2: The Three Divisions of In-Service Teachers' Professional Development (Ou, 1996, p. 98)



While Ou delineated four parts to the organization of professional development, Guskey (2000) considered four dimensions of professional development activities: (a) general education pedagogy knowledge, (b) curriculum design and teaching strategy knowledge, (c) professional education attitudes, and (d) the ability to construct knowledge. General education pedagogy knowledge refers to knowledge pertaining to the value of education, philosophy, sociology, education psychology, and the education environment. Curriculum design and teaching strategy knowledge refers to a deep understanding of teaching strategies, classroom management, and content-area knowledge. Professional education attitudes refer to teachers' commitment to their profession. Teachers are expected to be responsible and enthusiastic about teaching as well as willing to keep up with research. Last, the ability to construct knowledge means teachers should be capable of building on the other three dimensions to generate their own knowledge.

Features of Effective Professional Development

According to Yeh (2007), successful professional development relies heavily on teachers' voluntary participation and intrinsic motivation to engage in self-improvement and continuous learning (p. 19). In addition, many scholars and educators have also addressed the topic of what ideal professional development should look like (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Avalos, 2011; Bailey et al., 2001; Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Butler et al., 2004; Chen, 2001; Chen & Tsai, 2012; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Crowther & Cannon, 2002; Daloglu, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2000; Hill, 2009; Maor, 2003; McCotter, 2001; Ou, 1996; Richter et al., 2011; Tseng, 2003; Williams, 1995; Yang & Liu, 2004; Yeh, 2007; Zhan, 2000).

Accordingly, good professional development should include:

1. **Bottom-up design:** Teachers benefit more from training activities that empower them to select the forms, topics, and content of training programs so that they can solve their immediate problems, improve their teaching techniques and strategies, and enhance teaching effectiveness. Teachers' needs should be the first concern when planning professional development. Williams (1995) claimed that adults' learning motivation is based on personal needs and interests rather than on external pressures, another consideration with regard to creating teacher-centered activities.
2. **Administrative support:** Administrators play a significant role in fostering the effectiveness of teachers' professional development. That is, schools should take the most responsibility for teacher professional development, and ideally, principals

- should lead department supervisors, teachers, students, parents, and experts to develop appropriate curriculum to foster their own school culture. Leaders' attitudes and beliefs toward teachers' professional development are important in executing successful training programs.
3. **Teacher attendance choice:** The education authority should organize professional development appropriately and provide learning opportunities equally to all teachers. Instead of assigning teachers to attend workshops, teachers should be empowered to choose which training workshops to attend according to their interests and needs.
 4. **Collaborative learning community:** Training should involve a collaborative learning community, ideally consisting of principals, department supervisors, teachers, and experts engaging in professional dialogues, examination of teaching, and design of suitable curriculum.
 5. **Praxis oriented approach:** Teachers should systematically analyze, reflect, and test their teaching so that they can generate their own teaching theory and beliefs based on experience. Ou (1996) stated that the gaps between theory and practice could be bridged if teachers' needs and teaching difficulties can be taken care of, and then meaningful learning may occur.
 6. **Practical implementation:** Teachers value professional development that facilitates the acquisition of practical teaching skills more than training that simply presents theories.

7. Time considerations: Time is key to effective professional development. The traditional three-hour, one-shot workshops usually do not have follow-up activities, which makes teachers feel frustrated when applying new teaching strategies learned at a workshop. In effective training workshops, follow-up activities should be included so that teachers' problems in trying new techniques can be discussed and solved.

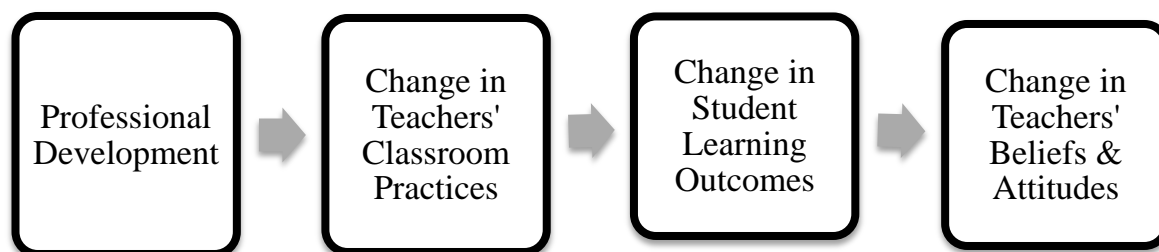
Professional development for teacher change

Jenlink and Kinnucan-Welsch (2001) proposed that “professional development is about change: change in individuals, their perspectives and personal theories and their practice” (p. 716). However, teacher change is an ongoing process, which cannot occur nor be observed overnight (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Desimone et al., 2002; Lange, 1990; Stephens, Gaffney, Weinzierl, Shelton, & Clark, 1993; Yeh, 2007). Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) suggested the central focus of current professional development efforts most closely follow along with the “changes as growth or learning” (p. 948); that is, teachers change to a sequent learning process in nature through professional activities.

Another approach to understanding change through professional development is through Guskey's model of teacher change (2002), which suggested that consequential change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes takes place only after a teacher has experimented and evidenced changes in student learning outcomes. According to Guskey (2002), the progressions in student learning are the significant result of changes in the teachers' pedagogical approach that they have applied to their curriculum. Changes in pedagogy can

take a variety of forms, such as adaptation of new teaching techniques, adjustments in classroom management, and use of a new curriculum or teaching materials. In general, teachers realize different ways to help students learn and meet their learning goals (Liao, 2007; Shinde & Karekatti, 2012; Stephens et al., 1993). Guskey's process model (see Figure 3) emphasizes the outcomes of the stages listed in the following order: (a) professional development, (b) change in teachers' classroom practices, (c) change in student learning outcomes, and (d) change in teachers' beliefs and attitudes.

Figure 3: Guskey's Model of Teacher Change (Guskey, 2002, p. 383)



Guskey (2002) also suggested three guiding principles vital to planning effective professional development activities: (a) recognize that change is a steady and difficult process for teachers; (b) ensure that teachers receive expected feedback on progress of student learning; and (c) provide continued support and follow-up activities after the initial instruction.

In extrapolating from these aspects of teachers' change, we can say that two main factors lead to change in teaching behaviors: external forces and internal forces (Bailey et al., 2001; Guskey, 2002; Siemens, 2010; Stephens et al., 1993). External forces require teachers

to change to meet expectations or specifications laid down by administrative authorities (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Guskey, 2002; Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsch, 2001), while internal forces represent teacher change derived from self-awareness of inadequacies in knowledge, skills, or competencies (Guskey, 2002; Yang & Liu, 2004; Yeh, 2007).

Consequently, the design of professional development activities requires enhancing teachers' professional learning, changes, and instruction, as well as applying new knowledge shared by experts and/or colleagues.

Teacher learning communities

Teachers need a space in which they can feel comfortable and confident enough to share their successes and challenges: a teacher learning community (TLC) (Birchak et al., 1998; Boon, 2005; Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Kooy, 2006; Huang, 2008; Wald & Castleberry, 2000). A teacher learning community was defined by Birchak et al. (1998) as

a voluntary group of teachers who come together to talk and create theoretical and practical understandings with each other. This talk integrates theory and practice, sharing and dialogue in powerful ways.... The power of teacher study groups is based on a collaborative learning process with each other ... (p. 28).

That is, a TLC is an organization in which small teams of teachers can work together, learning and sharing a variety of teaching methods and strategies, for their own professional growth (Glatthorn, 1987; Huang, 2007). These communities are noted for having great success in accomplishing teachers' objectives and increasing teachers' self-improvement as well as teaching confidence (Boon, 2005; Guskey, 2002).

A TLC focuses on building teacher capacity, with specific emphasis on helping teachers gain mastery of knowledge and skills for improving their instruction and their

students' learning (Barab, Makinster, & Scheckler, 2003; Utecht, 2010). A TLC requires teachers to participate in collaborative work teams that, ideally, meet regularly for joint lesson planning, problem solving, and implementation of personal and school goals (Allan & Miller, 1990; Birchaket al., 1998; Boon, 2005; Huang, 2007; Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Rao, 2003; Wald & Castleberry, 2000). That is, a TLC is not only an alternative model of teacher professional development that centers on collaboration, but may also be one of the most successful approaches toward improving the teaching and learning process. In contrast to a traditional top-down model (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Leahy & William, 2009; Tseng, 2003), the TLC is viewed as a bottom-up process (Bailey et al., 2001; Guskey, 2000; Hill, 2009) because the forms, processes, and contents are all determined by the teachers themselves instead of by administrative authorities.

Research has shown that a TLC is an effective avenue to enhance professional performance (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Richter et al., 2011; Tseng, 2003; Wald & Castleberry, 2000). In addition, the research emphasizes that a TLC is a successful form of professional development because it is based on these two main characteristics: (a) an active learning process and (b) collaboration (Allan & Miller, 1990; Boon, 2005; Huang, 2007; Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Rao, 2003; Wald & Castleberry, 2000). In traditional professional development trainings, administrators or researchers determine the learning contents of the programs, and teachers are merely passive knowledge receivers (Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Chao et al., 2006; Sandholtz, 2002; Tseng, 2003). By contrast, teachers become active knowledge explorers in a learning community

where they gain ownership and autonomy over their learning as the contents and process of a learning community are decided by the teachers themselves (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Kooy, 2006; Shih, 2001; Wiley & Schooler, 2000; Yang, & Liu, 2004). That is to say, a TLC is beneficial for professional development since the content is chosen to meet TLC teachers' needs and interests based on the TLC teachers' specific teaching issues or specific problems encountered in school life (Huang, 2008; McCotter, 2001; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Rao, 2003; Tseng, 2003; Wald & Castleberry, 2000; Zhan, 2000).

The second significant feature of the TLC is collaboration. The collaborative atmosphere inherent in a community decreases teachers' feelings of isolation (Barab et al., 2003; Clair, 1998; Huffman & Kalnin, 2003; Wald & Castleberry, 2000). Even from a theoretical perspective, specifically from Dewey (1916), we understand that learning is tied to exchanging experiences, and thus the surrounding community plays a significant part in the learning process. That is, the professional knowledge and education-related experiences are communicated in the TLC and thus shared among the participants. A substantial body of research places high value on the collaborative nature in a learning community (Birchaket al., 1998; Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004; Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Huffman & Kalnin, 2003; Kooy, 2006; McCotter, 2001).

In comparing the TLC to traditional professional development trainings, we see that teachers in the latter instance work individually with few opportunities to collaborate with others. Yet researchers have shown that people who learn in a collaborative environment perform significantly better than when they learn on their own (Allan & Miller, 1990; Barab

et al., 2003; Edge, 2002; Huang, 2007; Huffman & Kalnin, 2003; Liaw et al., 2008; Maro, 2003; McCotter, 2001; Rao, 2003; Richter et al., 2011; Suthers, 2001; Utecht, 2010; Zhan, 2000). Why does collaborative learning seem to improve teaching performance? According to Wald and Castleberry (2000) “the collaborative learning process engages members of the community in a cycle of exploring, experimenting, and reflecting relative to a specific outcome. The knowledge and skills that are generated through collaborative inquiry enrich the knowledge base of the school (p.4).”

In other words, in a collaborative process, discussion is intended to provide space for different viewpoints as well as open dialogue is made beyond individual teacher’s understanding since teachers as a group can collaboratively generate and refine ideas (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Huang, 2008; Richter et al., 2011). As a result, teachers carry new ideas, understandings, and thinking, back into their schools and classrooms (Allan & Miller, 1990; Butler et al., 2004; Edge, 2002; Huang, 2007; Shih & Lou, 2011; Utecht, 2010; Yeh, 2007; Zhan, 2000).

McCotter (2001) demonstrated the effectiveness of collaborative learning by examining a group called Literacy Education for a Democratic Society (LEADS). There were three characteristics of the LEADS group that made it successful as a vehicle for teachers to achieve professional growth. First through dialogue, McCotter saw that new ideas could grow and become more concrete as participants shared different perspectives while contributing to the conversation. From the conversation, she noted that teachers found that other members had encountered similar situations or difficulties, so they felt that they were

not isolated. Second, she observed that teachers appreciated opportunities to have a safe place to seek feedback, ask questions, and tell stories. Specifically, sharing their difficulties and events in practical teaching situations helped teachers to “unload” their pressures and to seek suggestions from others to help solve their problems. Even having an opportunity to just sympathize with one another about matters beyond their control was a positive form of support. The third characteristic of the LEADS group was collaboration. McCotter’s findings (2001) showed that collaboration was an important component of beneficial professional development. Participants in her study collaborated with each other by sharing experiences and knowledge and this sharing helped teachers develop new ideas and deeper understandings.

In collaborative learning, not only are learners encouraged to share their thoughts with one another, but they may also act as mediators of other learners’ thinking (Allen & Miller, 1990; Clair, 1998; Huang, 2007; Zhan, 2000). As a result, each member is responsible not only for his or her own development with regard what is shared but also for helping other members learn. Every member has to rely on the others to achieve the goal of the learning community, which is to promote the development of all, and feedback from community members becomes very important. In the learning community, members may develop higher-level thinking skills, such as analysis or synthesis (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Huang, 2008; Tseng, 2003). Thus collaboration provides an environment for learners to become effective thinkers and to learn to pose good questions, to clearly articulate their significant

problems, and support each other's learning (Abdullah & Jacobs, 2004; Barab et al., 2003; Edge, 2002).

Collaboration in web-based learning communities

Due to the geographical and temporal limitations of face-to-face community interactions, more and more people have begun using online forums to create web-based learning communities (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Barab et al., 2003; Kamthi-Stein, 2000; Liaw et al., 2008; Maor, 2003; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Rheingold, 2000; Trewern & Lai, 2001; Werry & Mowbray, 2001; Wellman, Hasse, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). According to Ng and Cheung (2007), an online teacher learning community is more likely to provide teachers with opportunities to share expertise, try out new ideas, reflect on practices, and develop new curriculum ideas with one another. As a result, all the online group members can read the same message about a specific topic, read comments, and make responses in the same online learning community. Furthermore, the application of the online forum in a collaborative teacher learning community in which all participants can exchange ideas, lesson plans, textbook reviews, and so forth has great potential for mutual communication across boundaries of time and space (Liaw et al., 2008; Trewern & Lai, 2001; Wiley & Schooler, 2000; Tseng, 2003).

One of the goals of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) education is to develop an online forum through which English language teachers can work together, share their knowledge, and increase their understanding of teaching pedagogies in the English language teaching field (Kamthi-Stein, 2000). With regard to this goal, the online

TESOL teachers' professional development programs are attracting more attention and recognition, emphasizing the importance of collaborative teaching and learning for English language teachers (Kamhi-Stein, 2000). Teachers' professional development has the function of giving guidance to possible pedagogic choices, teaching strategies, second language (L2) instructional methods, course design, and teaching materials for both novice and experienced teachers (Kamhi-Stein, 2000; Mann, 2005).

However, many studies have shown limitations in online teacher learning community activities, including a lack motivation, interactions, and depth (Borko et al., 2008; Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Tseng, 2003). Studies that explore teacher online interactions in communities are often limited to case analyses and interviews and do not offer enough information about overall behavior and content pattern of teacher communities. Thus, it is necessary to design an online teacher-learning community which allows teachers to virtually visit the room and participate in online discussion, and to develop a sense of belonging to collaborate with, share with, and learn from each other.

Online Professional Development

Over the past decade, technological development has facilitated the progress of human civilization, improved living environments, and increased human welfare (Kern, 2006; Ming et al., 2010; Senior, 2010; Wang, 2009). The advent of new technologies and the massive popularity of the Internet provide endless possibilities for innovative approaches in delivering and/or facilitating online teacher professional development (Lock, 2006; Marrero et al., 2010). The dynamic nature of online professional development that uses interactive

web tools may not only address the issues of the traditional approach to professional development but also incorporate the benefits of a teacher learning community as well as offering teachers easy access to professional development.

These new technologies are already being introduced to teachers in schools in Taiwan in order to enrich the teaching and learning experience of students and meet the goals of reform agendas dictated by the Taiwanese government (Liaw et al., 2008; Kao & Tsai, 2009; MOE, 2012; Yeh, 2007; Wang, 2009). However, the technologies are being introduced via the top-down educational reform agenda and are predicated on an assumption that once the hardware is made available to teachers in schools, information and communications technologies (ICTs) integration will automatically follow. But schools have to infuse ICTs into the teaching arena wisely. For example, teachers need to know how to use ICTs appropriately in order to enhance their teaching strategies and techniques (Liaw et al., 2008; Johnson & Kaye, 2004; Koehler & Mishra, 2009; Ming et al., 2010; Senior, 2010).

As Simonson, Smaldino, Albright and Zvacek (2006) emphasized, the process of using technology and its connection-making capacity for learning activities requires that learning theories be reformulated for the digital age. Simonson et al. proposed a theory of connectivity, which puts forth the notion that we derive our competence from making connections with others. This point is supported by Senior (2010) who observed that in a digital world, knowledge is the property of a teacher learning community rather than an individual possession.

As a result, new technologies may pose a considerable challenge for most teachers, whose pre-service education may have failed to prepare them for the digital era (Liou, 2001; Schmidt et al., 2009). If teachers have a strong belief that knowledge must be delivered in traditional ways, then using ICTs could feel like an extra burden. Thus, it is not uncommon to find resistance to technology in educational settings. In addition, due to the educational reform in Taiwan, teachers are facing a shift in roles from the traditional style of teacher to more of a teacher-facilitator. In other words, more modern teachers want to increase their disciplinary knowledge and expand their awareness of instructional theories involving technology, believing that it may help them teach more effectively and efficiently (Freire, 1993; Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Liaw et al., 2008; Ming et al., 2010; Schmidt et al., 2009; Senior, 2010; Yang & Liu, 2004). This requires the full integration of ICTs into professional practice. Teachers who understand and believe in the capacity of the new technologies will apply them to foster learning in positive ways. In addition, they may see the benefits of ICTs with regard to their own learning and development.

Importance of ICTs

Using the definition provided by Pigg and Crank (2004) information and communications technologies (ICTs) refer to a “diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information.” ICTs are similar to Information Technology (IT), but focus primarily on communication technologies, including the Internet, wireless networks, computers, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), and cell phones. That is, the communication of ICTs is multi-faceted

and interactive including text, audio and video, as well as it is real-time or asynchronous, which may offer some real possibilities for people with establishing relationships and creating community in either offline or online involvements (Dutton, 1996; Kanokpermpoon, 2013; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Rheingold, 2000; Wellman et al., 2001).

There have been a number of research studies documenting the increasing use of ICTs for collaborative teacher development in remote locations. As these studies indicated ICTs are becoming an important tool and resource that teachers can use to cycle through the stages of the learning, from initial skills or information acquisition, to application and reflective understanding, and finally to knowledge and innovation among teachers (Dutton, 1996; Hill, 2009; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Pratt et al., 2001; Rheingold, 2000; Richards, 2005; Warschauer, 1996; Wang, 2008). For example, in teacher education and professional development, ICTs connect more effectively with both the specific content of the curriculum and the various stages and elements of the learning process (Galanouli et al., 2003; Levy, 1998; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Roschelle & Pea, 1999; Wellman et al., 2001). There is a greater appreciation of the growing where distance communities of practice differ from face-to-face alternatives.

ICTs provide many advantages in distance education. First, learning can occur at any time or place (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Roschelle & Pea, 1999; Yang, & Liu, 2004). Second, ICTs help promote collaboration and interaction among learners (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Rheingold, 2000; Wang, 2008). Third, since the Internet offers various resources to teachers and students, the content of instruction can be extended (Ng &

Cheung, 2007; Richards, 2005; Wellman et al., 2001). In other words, ICTs offer opportunities for learners to increase creative activities with multimedia components. For example, the learners can choose a variety of software tools to create and edit audio material, edit and manipulate images, and combine audio and images to produce video content in a format compatible with popular media players, such as an audio book or a digital story.

In addition, the frequency of learners' engagement in ICTs-based activities is related to collaborative learning, social interaction, and a sense of being part of a web-based learning community. Goeller (2001) pointed out that using the web-based community in language learning could offer a many-to-many communication, a place-independent learning environment, and computer-mediated interaction. By using the network, people can talk online in any place at any time. Moreover, Mulquin (2002) indicated that the web-based environment is an effective medium for collaborative learning, since it provides a shared space essential for group interaction and interpretation. Learners communicate and interact with each other by sending and receiving messages typed on the Internet, which is available for 24 hours every day (Galanouli et al., 2003; Kanokpermpoon, 2013; Kern, 2006; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Wang, 2008). Because of these advantages, learners can create their own knowledge and collaborate with peers virtually, whenever they want and wherever they are.

To sum up, ICTs enable an optimal learning environment without the limitations of time, space, and money. Because of the various resources provided through ICTs, learners may have a greater motivation for continuous learning. These are benefits for the both teachers and learners. Thus, it may be no surprise that the ICTs are becoming a widespread

communication model in teaching and learning environments in recent years (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Galanouli et al., 2003; Goeller, 2001; Kanokpermpoon, 2013; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Richards, 2005; Van Merriënboer & Paas, 2003; Wellman et al., 2001; Yang, & Liu, 2004).

Pitfalls of ICTs

Using technology for learning and teaching presents a great opportunity in education. Online teaching and learning can supplement and complement professional development (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Hill, 2009; Pigg & Crank, 2004; Yang & Liu, 2004). However, educators should not just stitch together available electronic sources to “deliver” conventional but ineffective pedagogical approaches through the Internet. For instance, e-learning is delivered via standard Internet media and tools. These include web pages, chat rooms, and discussion boards, often employed without a plan on interaction and coordination within disciplinary forms of representation (McCarney, 2004; Suthers, 2001; Yang & Liu, 2004). Some of the most important processes in collaboration, such as the creation of shared beliefs and values, are difficult to address in the web environment (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Huffman & Kalnin, 2003; McCotter, 2001). Moreover, participants often comment when people are learning together via face-to-face interactions that they are engaged interactively with a mentor or teacher, and that there is a rich interchange of graphical and verbal representations (Ng & Cheung, 2007; Senior, 2010; Suthers, 2001; Warschauer, 1996; Van Merriënboer & Paas, 2003). Gestures, pointing, and linguistic references to aspects of these representations are fundamental parts of the process of interpretation and the making of

meaning. Yet, the Internet does not allow these rich forms of communication. Thus, there is a need to explore how networking enables new forms of support for interaction in learning.

As an example, some of the problems cited above were noted by teachers in the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) ICT training (Galanouli et al., 2003). They stated that the reasons for failing to complete professional development learning activities were:

- lack of time
- technical and organizational difficulties
- poor support from trainers or mentors
- poor match of training materials to needs, and
- the requirements to complete exercises or compile portfolios were unrelated to current work.

Their common complaints about trainers included that the trainers either under- or over-estimated the teachers' existing knowledge, that there were frequent personnel changes that did not allow trainers to establish an effective working relationship with teachers, or that trainers failed to respond to communications. There was also a lack of differentiation in the training programs to challenge the highly competent ICT users and at the same time meet the needs of those teachers with lower levels of confidence (Galanouli et al., 2003; Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; McCarney, 2004; Richards, 2005).

Overall, these drawbacks in using ICTs in an educational environment served as a reminder to the researcher to design effective online professional development for Taiwanese English language teachers. Nonetheless, ICTs can still become powerful tools for extending

educational pedagogies, improving instructional strategies, techniques and skills, and promoting long-term learning opportunities within an OPDC for Taiwanese ESL teachers.

The importance of CMC

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) as defined by Romiszowski and Ravitz (1997) “allows communication between different parties separated in space and/or, mediated by interconnected computers (p. 745).” Thus, CMC allows for the creation of learning environments in which communication can occur in the same geographical and physical places at different times, in different geographical and physical places at the same time, or in different geographical and physical places at different times (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011; Li et al., 2008; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Romiszowski & Ravitz, 1997; Warschauer, 1999; Wang, 2009).

With regard to the advance of ICTs and the growth of interest in e-learning many institutions are currently offering online courses that utilize a range of CMC tools that attract learners who need the flexibility (Galanouli et al., 2003; Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011; Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Li et al., 2008; Trewern & Lai, 2001). Along with this aspect, not surprisingly, CMC tools have become increasingly popular in the L2 classroom. Research suggests that the use of CMC tools in the L2 classroom improves student involvement (Kamthi-Stein, 2000; Warschauer, 1999) and cross-cultural understanding (Kern, 2006; Li et al., 2008), and promotes reflection on and awareness of how to use language in social discourse (Goeller, 2001; Warschauer, 1998; Wellman et al., 2001).

Moreover, CMC affords asynchronous (anytime), mobile (anywhere) communication that potentially connects widely to other people, both locally and globally, or synchronous (Blackboard Collaborate & web-based chats). Research indicates that when teachers are incorporating a new teaching strategies or observing different teaching experiences, the integration of CMC tools into the schools promotes collaboration among teachers and reduces the isolation felt by novice and inexperienced teachers (Barab et al., 2003; Hoven, 2006; Liou, 2001; Shinde & Karekatti, 2012). The Internet opens up opportunities not only for situational and collaborative learning, but also for online learning communities that provide teachers with opportunities to share ideas and innovative teaching techniques and strategies, and to reflect on classroom practices.

Asynchronous and synchronous

There are two types of CMC: asynchronous and synchronous (see Table 1). In asynchronous environments, shared postings and information are stable. As a result, the participants have more time to think about the discussion topics, refine their responses, and post them whenever they want (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011; Kern, 2006; LaPointe, 2007; Romiszowski & Ravitz, 1997). Examples of asynchronous communications are email, discussion rooms, bulletin boards, blogs, wikis, and excreta.

Synchronous communications, on the other hand, are referred to as real time meetings where participants engage each other online in real time. For example, in an online chat room the messages are posted and received immediately by typing text and using web-cams to see each other and/or by using a microphone to speak, allowing voice communications as well.

With synchronous chats, the flow of communication is simultaneous and can be compared to face-to-face classroom discussion. Examples of synchronous communication are video conferencing, audio conferencing, or instant messenger chats via Skype or Blackboard Collaborate. LaPointe (2007) claims that synchronous virtual voice settings expose participants, since learners have the advantage of voice plus the contextual information of tone, enthusiasm, inflection, and speed, as well as hesitation and silence to provide richer information (p. 94). However, Pallof and Pratt (2007) found that for synchronous communications to thrive, a facilitator is needed and should have the necessary skills to make the discussions productive; otherwise, it will disintegrate into simple one-line contributions of minimal depth and go astray of the topic (p. 68).

Table 1: Two Types of CMC (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011)

Asynchronous	Email, blog entries and posted comments, discussion board, wiki entries and posted comments, journal entries and posted comments, etc.
Synchronous	Voice and/or text chats including instant messaging using various online tools such as Skype, Blackboard Collaborate, etc. Audio and/or video web conference with or without text and white board applications.

Additionally, CMC can be categorized by the number of interlocutors (i.e., one-to-one, pairs, or group discussion) and the type of communication (LaPointe, 2007; Li et al., 2008; Maor, 2003; Wang, 2009). One or a combination of the following media can be used in CMC: text, audio/video, video, graphics, photos, and presentation materials such as PowerPoint, Word, Excel, and interactive whiteboard. Communication protocols are required: for instance, participants may take turns speaking or may raise their hands to ask

questions. Not surprisingly, how fast they give their responses and their consideration of others has become increasingly critical in synchronous communication (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Ng & Cheung, 2007; Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011).

According to Suler (2008), people who have poor typing skills may have a difficulty in an online environment. This is mostly true for synchronous text chats in which the need to provide an instantaneous response directs the flow of communication. Situations could be worse for people with weak reading and/or writing skills (Maor, 2003; Suler, 2008; Wang, 2009). Anxiety can be provoked in people with poor verbal/oral skills in voice and/or video synchronous chats; they will experience difficulty in expressing themselves in English. By contrast, an asynchronous form of communication provides people with time to think and compose their responses.

In conclusion, ICTs and CMC can be used to build an online collaborative teacher learning community as a forum for teachers' professional development in which teachers can communicate with one another in any place at any time. Even shy members can express their thoughts by contributing ideas online or talking with one another in online chat rooms. At most, perhaps, the most important aspect of utilizing online learning communities is that the members can get immediate feedback. As a result, community members are willing to share experiences with one another, are encouraged to learn, and will be eager to learn, as well.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the online professional development examined in this study falls within the sociocultural theory (Cobb, 1994; Peer & McClendon, 2002; Shrum &

Glisan, 2000; Swain, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998), social constructivism (Dewey, 1938; Kroll & LaBoskey, 1996; Van Merriënboer & Paas, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978) with transformative learning theory (Freire, 1993; Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011) will serve as a lens through which to view the design of this study.

Current conceptualization of sociocultural theory draws heavily on the work of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), whose social development theory (1978) of human learning describes learning as a social process; that is, social learning theory emphasizes that behaviors result from both the social interaction with people as well as environments (Wertsch, 1998). According to Swain (2000), sociocultural theory deals with the complexity of classroom learning and provides an insight into the moment-by-moment process used by teachers and learners in collaborative discussion and work. In this aspect, learning and development are both social processes and cognitive processes, and the opportunities for teaching and learning are situated in the discursive interactions between experts and teachers (Peer & McClendon, 2002; Shrum & Glisan, 2000).

Vygotsky studied the importance of learning in social settings and the impact of the assistance of more capable others on the development of the learner. He maintained that children rely on the example and skills of adults and more competent peers to gradually develop abilities to do certain tasks, such as talking about a theoretical concept or solving a complex problem. Even though Vygotsky's work principally centered on children, the same learning processes occur in adult learners. Thus, Vygotsky's theory assisted in understanding the process of how experienced teachers mentor novice teachers. More specifically, through a

professional development activity, experienced teachers may provide support to practicing teachers.

According to Vygotsky and other sociocultural theorists (Cobb, 1994; Shrum & Glisan, 2000; Swain, 2000; Wertsch, 1998) the social nature of cognitive development is captured in the concept of inter-subjectivity, which refers to mutual, shared understanding among participants in an activity. Specifically, the sociocultural theory emphasizes the important role of social interaction in the construction of knowledge (Peer & McClendon, 2002; Shrum & Glisan, 2000; Swain, 2000).

Within sociocultural theory, the concepts of zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding, and self-efficacy are particularly relevant to teachers' professional development. The ZPD is a major concept in Vygotsky's work. This zone is defined as the distance between what one can achieve alone, and what one can achieve with help (Peer & McClendon, 2002). That is, learning takes place in a social context in particular, interaction with peers or advanced learners (Vygotsky, 1978). A few studies showed the growth of teachers occurring through membership in a community, where the experienced peers help novices get to the next level by working with them in the zone of proximal development (Darling-Hammond, 1996; Klemm & Snell, 1996; Kooy, 2006; Wenger et al., 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the application of sociocultural theory in this study occurs when teachers interact socially with each other to develop a coherent process of continual professional development, which keeps the teachers up-to-date with the techniques required in a professional knowledge environment.

From the sociocultural concept of activity theory, technology can play a role as mediator in enriching group activities (Harasim, 1990; Klemm & Snell, 1996; Nardi, 1996; Suler, 2008; Wenger et al., 2002). Indeed, in web-based systems, cross-platform environments, hyperlink networks, and synchronous and/or asynchronous communication are all appropriate functions that provide learners with more opportunities to retrieve information and actively interact with other learners and instructors (Harasim, 1990; Senior, 2010; Suler, 2008; Suthers, 2001).

Thus, an online professional development course is rooted in social constructivism; working together while accomplishing a task is a characteristic of a powerful learning environment, aimed at the active construction of knowledge (Cobb, 1994; Kroll & LaBoskey, 1996; Van Merriënboer & Paas, 2003). For example, CMC is primarily devoted to social interaction because its users perceive a higher degree of social presence (Klemm & Snell, 1996; Romiszowski & Ravitz, 1997; Walther, 1995). In the CMC environment, instrumental tools (e.g. computer, software, keyboard, and monitors) and semiotic tools (text/language) are used to achieve online social interaction.

As teachers participate in professional development activities, they may have some modes of change in understanding how cognition is transformed from an initial state to a modified state and how it is also observable in behavior, speech, writing or other forms of production; that is transformation (Haythornthwaite & Andrews, 2011). Paulo Freire (1993) addressed conscientiousness not only as a process of social transformation, but also as an invitation to self-learning and self-transformation in its most spiritual and psychoanalytical

meaning. That is, teachers apply new concepts, techniques, strategies that they have learned in the professional development activities into curricula and classrooms in the same way as how learning and knowledge construction occur continuously from the interplay of elements in the environment teachers work in, and the meaning, interpretation, and actions that individually and collectively insert into the communal frame.

With regard to using the sociocultural theory, the social constructivism model and transformative learning theory, an OPDC in this study would contain that English language teachers provide feedback on each other's learning, understanding, and teaching techniques, as well as they get together online to share each other's beliefs, attitudes, and practices. As a result, through a web-based environment, English language teachers extend their professional knowledge, skills and abilities within a constructive process situated in specific cultural and social contexts, which is opposite to the traditional concept of an individual learning situation. This idea is in line with Dewey's view (1938) that knowledge emerges only from situations in which learners have to draw them out of meaningful experiences. Further, these situations have to be embedded in a social context, and forming a community of learners who construct their knowledge together provides such a context. Thus, the goal of this study is to create an online community for Taiwanese ESL teachers to develop mutual trust and to collaborate with native English speaking ESL teachers to discuss varied issues on English language teaching and applications, as well as to share ideas on how to implement a variety of teaching techniques and strategies into English lessons with a focus on transformative learning for sociocultural theory and social constructivism. Consequently, these English

language teachers would not only apply the knowledge that they have gained in the OPDC, but also retain the beliefs that they have built in the web-based community into a long-term learning environment.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Why Qualitative and Why Case Study?

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), a qualitative research method is defined as “being multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (p. 2). That is, it involves the study of people in their natural environment or social settings and the interpretation or examination of what people think or how they behave (Creswell, 2007). Given that the purpose of this study is to look closely at Taiwanese ESL teachers’ perspectives on participation in an online professional development course (OPDC), a qualitative research approach is justified. More specifically, in order to respond to the research questions, a case study approach was used which allows the voices of the teachers to emerge through rich description based on data sources that included interviews, pre- and post-questionnaires, electronic documentation of participation, and field notes. It is worth noting that a quantitative research methodology was considered; however, this would require the involvement of a large number of participants in order to enable the use of statistics for measurement and hypothesis testing. A quantitative research method also requires numerical reporting and quantitative analysis to achieve generalization across research populations (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), and this was not the intention of this study. As a result, it would be inappropriate to use a quantitative research methodology given the number of participants and the types of data sources suitable for this study.

Thus, in order to convey the Taiwanese ESL teachers' voice on engaging in the online professional development activities, a case study method was chosen. The case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, and school performance (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Yin, 2009). In addition, a case study can be used to study many situations, contributing to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, and related phenomena, according to Yin (2009). In this research, a case study was used in order to reveal the impact of the activities involved in the OPDC. That is, the study examined the process, and the individuals within the process, in a web-based professional development environment. Although other approaches, such as phenomenology and discourse analysis, might have been used for this study, neither addresses the research questions as well as the case study method.

A phenomenological approach is best used to uncover a phenomenon related to the lived experience of participants outside of the researcher's involvement (Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 2002; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011); however, this study focused on how participants engaged in and responded to activities in an OPDC led by the researcher/instructor. Furthermore, there was ongoing modification as the participants and researcher/instructor shaped the course together. A discourse analysis approach is also inappropriate as it looks closely and deeply at texts, searching for the patterns in and within the language used (Gee, 2011) rather than people's experiences. Other methods such as narrative (focused on personal stories/life experience), ethnography (focused on

culture/immersion in cultures), and grounded theory (focused on perspectives of participants and theory development) are not suitable because the focus of this study is to capture, analyze, and describe viewpoints with regard to participation in a new activity (Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 2002; Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011).

Qualitative research

Hanley-Maxwell, Hano, and Skivington (2007) stated that qualitative research is an inductive process by which the researcher allows data interpretations to evolve and reveal patterns before, during, and after the data collection process (p. 100). A qualitative researcher prefers modes of data collection that are more personal and interactive; thus, interviews, observations, document reviews, and visual materials are the primary methods used (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Mertens, 2010). Furthermore, qualitative researchers emphasize understanding and analyzing data in order to provide rich descriptions of research context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2009). That is, a qualitative research method is used to understand multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge (Mertens, 2010, p. 18).

The use of qualitative research is usually underpinned by a constructivist paradigm, in which reality is viewed as subjective and socially constructed by people active in the research process (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). In a framework of constructivist paradigm, it focuses on the “processes” of interaction among individuals, as well as the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants (Creswell, 2003).

As a result, this qualitative study design was consistent with a constructivist paradigm in that it was designed to give participants the opportunity to interact and discuss various English language teaching resources, techniques, and strategies. Furthermore, this study focused on investigating perspectives on background and activity, recording all along relative to participants' experiences including collaborative learning in a teacher learning community. This study also investigated participants' perspectives of the online professional development to reflect whether or not they see that they benefited, as well as the process of their emerging perspectives on an OPDC.

Case study

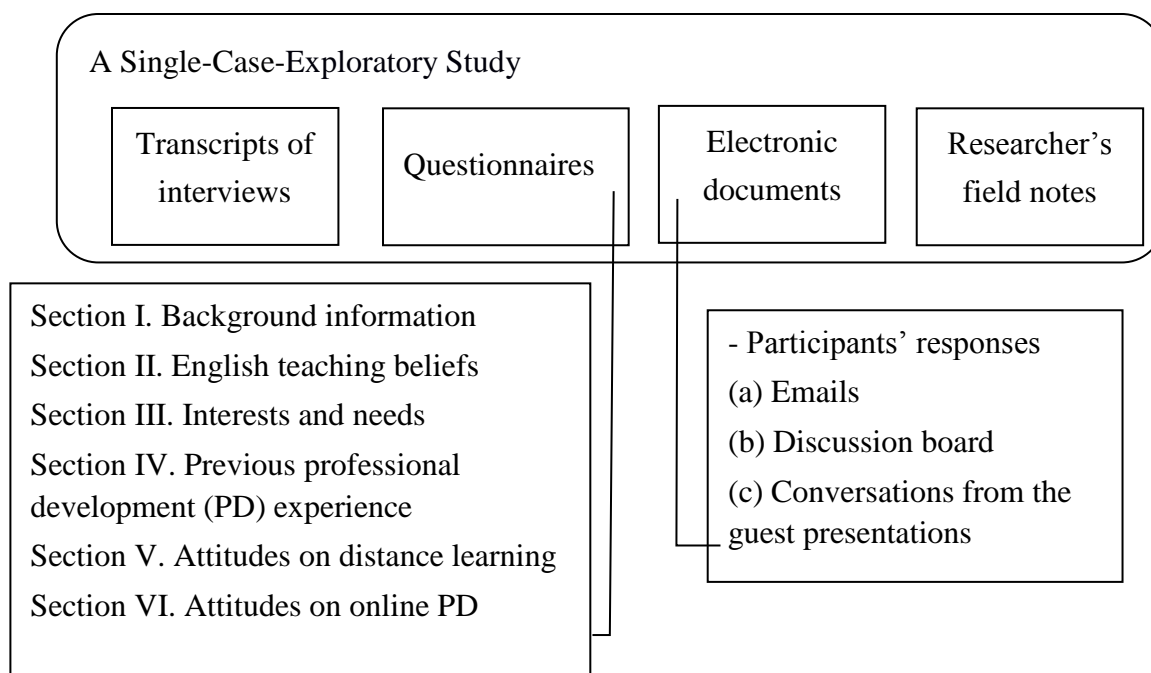
A case study is an investigative approach that facilitates the exploration of a phenomenon within its real-life context in a particular situation (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2003, 2007; Tellis, 1997; Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) not only categorized types of case studies as explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive, but also differentiated the units of analysis for single-case studies in terms of holistic design, single-case study with embedded design, multiple-case study with holistic design, and multiple-case study with embedded design.

According to Yin (2009), an explanatory study is that the researcher is seeking to answer a question that tries to explain the causal links in real-life interventions that are too complex for survey strategies. An exploratory study, by contrast, is used to explore situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set of outcomes. A descriptive study requires a descriptive theory to be developed before starting the research. With regard to the purposes of this study, an exploratory case study was the most relevant to this inquiry.

A single-case study design would be more appropriate to confirm or challenge a theory, or to represent a unique or extreme case (Yin, 2009). Levy (1988) suggested that single-case studies are ideal for articulating cases where a researcher may have a connection to a phenomenon that was previously unavailable. That is to say, the single-case study design is intended to address specific issues, to understand differences shown in the system, and to investigate changes after conducting an action.

In terms of this study, the case study methodology was used to allow the researcher to examine a professional development course/activity/program as a whole, allowing for an in-depth look at the experience from multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002; Tellis, 1997). As a result, the use of a single-case-exploratory methodology and qualitative data collection, through interviews, pre- and post-questionnaires, electronic documentation of participation and field notes, was the most appropriate approach for this study because (a) the data were useful in addressing the research questions, (b) it allowed greater confidence in the results and findings of the study, and (c) it provided creative ways to collect data and determine when, where, and how the data would be gathered. The following figure provides a visual representation of the embedded research data.

Figure 4: Visual Representation of the Research Data



Unit of analysis

According to Willig (2008), case studies are not characterized by the methods used to collect and analyze data, but rather by their focus on a particular unit of analysis (p. 74). That is, the unit of analysis for this study is the viewpoint, and more specifically, the viewpoint of Taiwanese ESL teachers with regard to their experience of an OPDC.

Research Questions

The focus of this study was Taiwanese ESL teachers' perspectives on participation in the Taiwanese ESL Teachers' Online Professional Development Community (TOPDC). That is, the emphasis of the study was on examining the online professional development activities from the viewpoints of the participants and thus these research questions were answered directly from the data generated before, during, and after the completion of the TOPDC.

Overarching research question for the study:

What are Taiwanese ESL teachers' perspectives on participating in an online professional development setting?

To answer this question, we consider sub-questions.

1. How might an online professional development course address the learning needs and interests of Taiwanese ESL teachers?

Ng and Cheung (2007) stated that the best professional development can begin with teachers' real concerns and questions about helping students learn, and this step actually begins with the teachers themselves (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Yeh, 2007; Zhan, 2000). It is important to find out what types of professional development activities/courses/programs might address the Taiwanese ESL teachers' needs, as well as give them opportunities to gain professional knowledge and abilities and enhance teaching techniques and pedagogies.

2. How might an online professional development course impact Taiwanese ESL teachers' classroom practice?

Guskey (2000) described professional development as a series of "processes and activities, which include formal and informal workshops, designed to enhance the professional knowledge, teaching techniques, beliefs, attitudes and efficacy of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students" (p. 16). Specifically, in order to understand if the online professional development activities of the TOPDC had any effect on teachers' professional knowledge, teaching techniques and changes, it is imperative to

include their appraisal of their experiences and outcomes through in-depth discussions after the completion of the course.

3. How might information and communications technologies (ICTs) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) be leveraged to facilitate collaborative professional development activities for Taiwanese ESL teachers in an online professional development setting?

With regard to the development of technologies, ICTs and CMC have been used to support a collaborative learning environment (Pigg & Crank, 2004). Recall from the literature review the variety of CMC tools that can be used in an online learning environment. Thus, it was important to study their differences and select tools that would work best for the learning activities in the TOPDC. As a result, in order to provide a flexible and collaborative learning environment, I chose to use an online discussion board (asynchronous) which allows the participants to respond at anytime, and CourseSites Live (synchronous) which provides an interactive learning environment in the TOPDC.

4. What might Taiwanese ESL teachers' motivations be to sustain an online professional development course?

Yeh (2007) mentioned that a successful teachers' professional development course relies heavily on teachers' voluntary participation and inherent motivation to engage in self-improvement and continuous learning (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Maor, 2003; Hill, 2009; Williams, 1995). Thus, it is essential to understand the reasons that the Taiwanese ESL

teachers were willing to participate in the TOPDC especially as this was a free online course, and the teachers would not receive any credits or grades for their participation.

Design of the Study

Setting

In order to create a new online learning environment for Taiwanese teachers' professional development and to be able to connect English teachers/ educators/ experts at a distance, interactive, free online learning platform was needed. CourseSites (www.coursesites.com), designed specifically for an individual instructor, is a non-cost online learning environment provided by Blackboard Collaborate™. Once an online course is created on CourseSites, an instructor can set up the course to match personal teaching style, curricula, and students' needs. It allows an instructor to post and update course materials, to interact with students, to encourage collaboration, and to monitor performance, anywhere, anytime, 24/7, via the Internet. It offers various tools, such as Announcements, Calendar, Blogs, Discussion Board, Journals, Wiki, CourseSites Live (an online live classroom that is compatible with CourseSites and provide by Blackboard Collaborate), and Glossary.

Based on these features, the TOPDC was delivered using the CourseSites software; it allowed the researcher/instructor, the guest speakers, and the participants to be located in different countries.

Participants

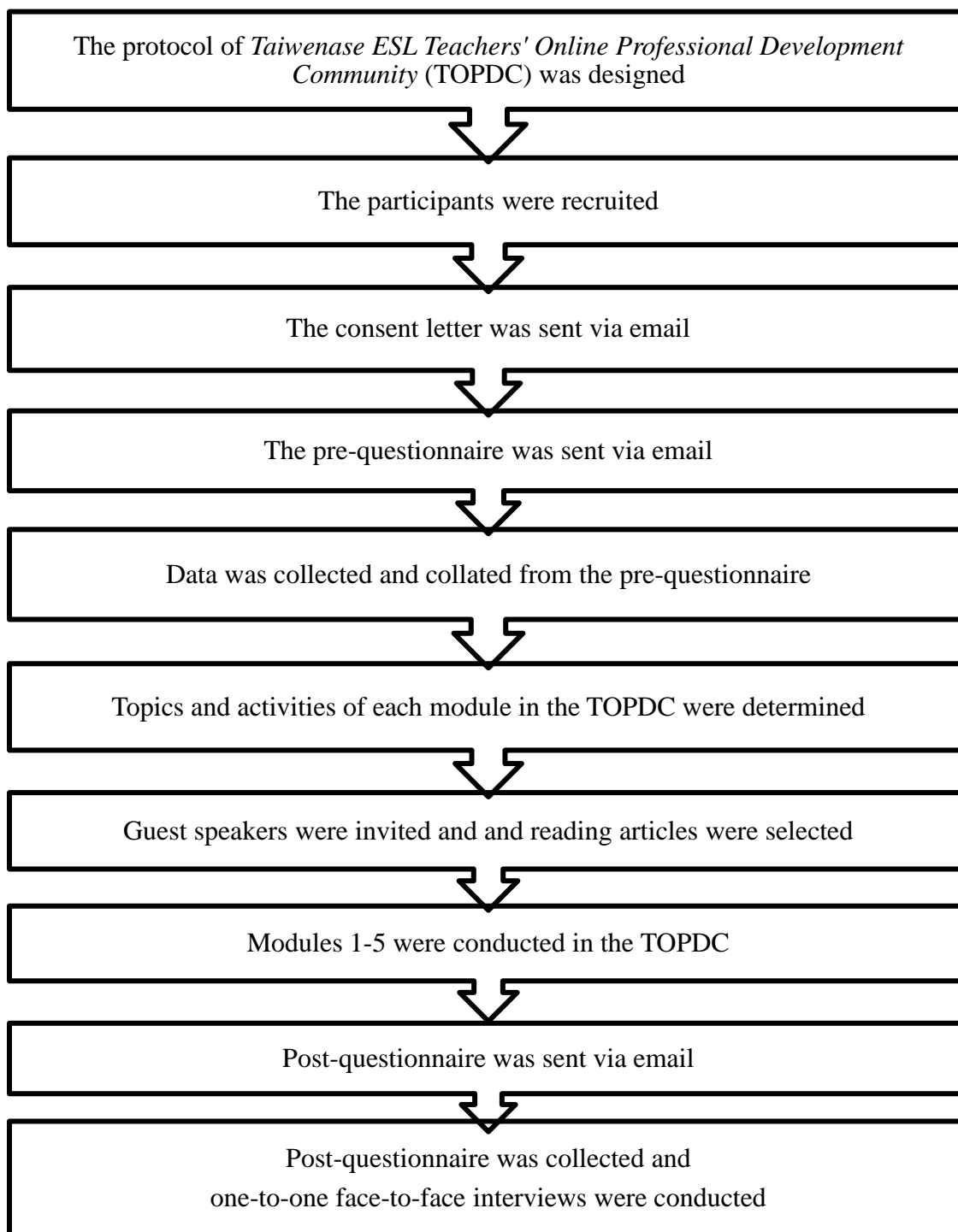
The population for the study consisted of Taiwanese ESL teachers from the face-to-face professional development. According to Remler and Van Ryzin (2011), convenience

sampling refers to the process of getting ideas and opinions about a phenomenon from people who are recruited easily or naturally into a study. Thus, the selection of participants was based on determining which teachers were willing to participate in the OPDC.

Research timeline

The protocol of this study was first developed before conducting face-to-face professional development in summer 2012 in southern Taiwan, and the framework of the course (TOPDC) was introduced on the last day of the face-to-face professional development course. At the same time, the participants were asked to volunteer to take part in the TOPDC. After receiving an approval letter from Institutional Review Board (IRB), a consent letter and pre-questionnaire were sent to the participants via email. Later, as the signed consent letters were received, I reviewed, collated, and confirmed the feedback from the pre-questionnaire, and the topics and activities for each module of the TOPDC were determined. Next, the guest speakers were invited, and items for reading lists were selected. The TOPDC was held over 14 weeks with two asynchronous activities (reading and posting writing) and three synchronous activities (CourseSites Live). Finally, the post-questionnaire was sent via email and collected by the researcher before beginning one-to-one face-to-face interviews in southern Taiwan. The timeline below shows when the study was conducted (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Research Timeline



Approach to data collection

There were four main data sources: the pre- and post-questionnaires, the interview transcripts, the electronic documentation of participation and the field notes used to capture participants' viewpoints about online professional development of planning, organizing, and implementing teaching/learning strategies. The results derived from these data sources provided me with information to organize and code the data into patterns and themes that help to answer the research questions (See Figure 6).

Pre- & post-questionnaires

The purpose of the questionnaires was to be able to gather the data required to understand the participants' educational backgrounds, teaching beliefs, previous professional development experiences, needs and interests, and attitudes toward online/ distance learning (see Appendix C).

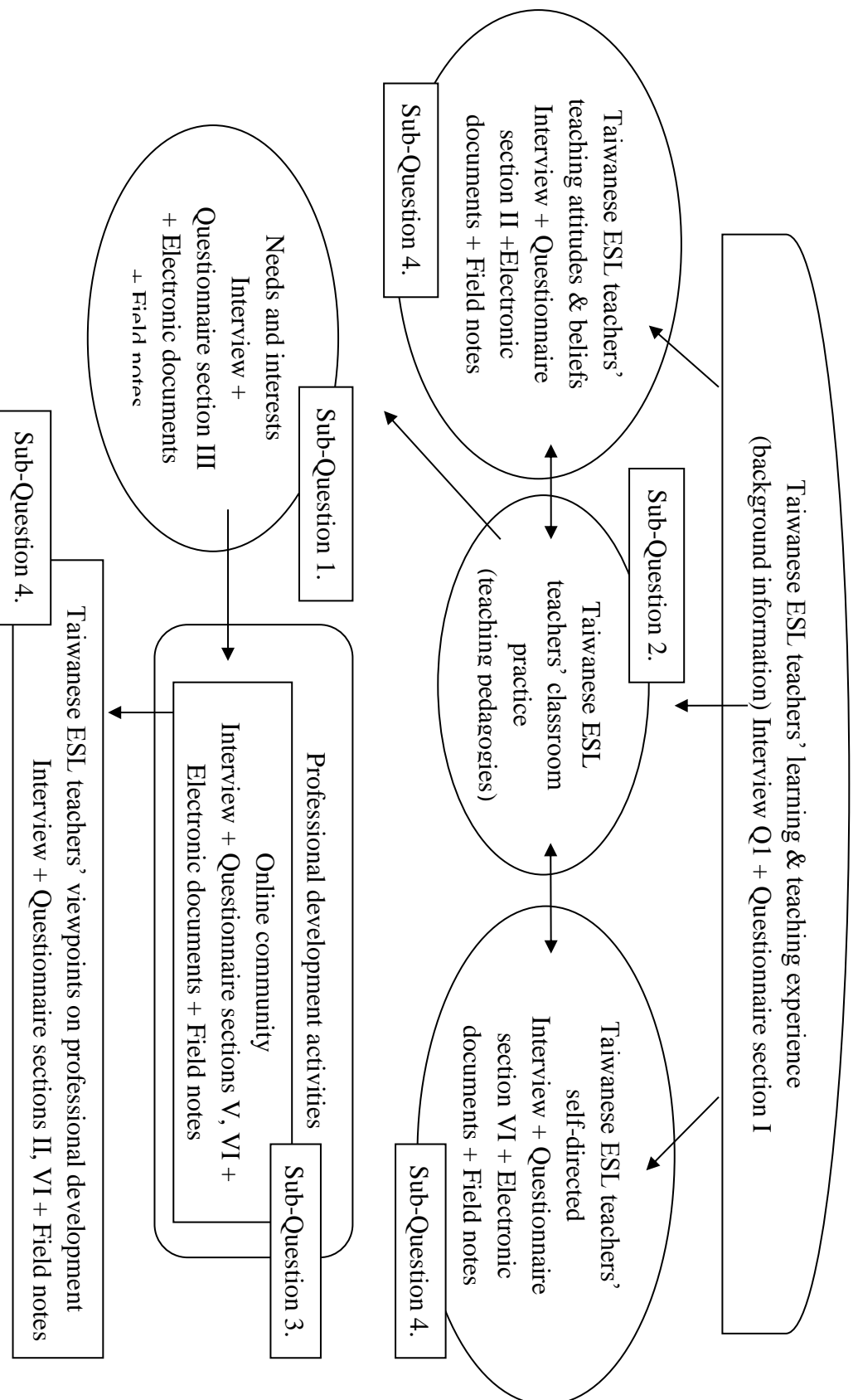
The pre-questionnaire included the following six sections:

Section I. Teacher's age, gender, educational knowledge and teaching experience, used to provide general information about the participants.

Section II. Teacher's beliefs, adapted from Shinde and Karekatti (2012), reporting participant's own knowledge of, and personal beliefs about English teaching pedagogies for ESL students.

Section III. Teacher's interests and needs which determined the topic of each module in the TOPDC.

Figure 6: Overall Outline of the Methodology



Section IV. Teacher's previous professional development experiences which provided information for understanding the participants' experiences of attending a variety of professional development activities/courses/workshops.

Section V. Teacher's attitudes on distance learning, adapted from Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, and Zvacek (2006), providing data from which to understand the participants' opinions of a new learning/teaching methodology, distance learning.

Section VI. Teacher's attitudes to online professional development, adapted from Kao and Tsai (2009), providing data from which to understand the participants' opinions of taking part in an OPDC.

In order to understand whether the participant's beliefs about and attitudes toward the use of online teaching and learning changed after completing the TOPDC, only sections II (Teachers' beliefs), V (Teachers' attitudes to distance learning), and VI (Teachers' attitudes to online professional development) were included in the post-questionnaire.

These data were interpreted to support the qualitative data from interviews, electronic documentation of participation, and field notes, with the aim of answering the research questions. Therefore, I used sections I and IV of the questionnaire to understand each participant's background information and professional development experience. Section II represents each participant's second language teaching and learning beliefs. The data in this section from the pre- and post-questionnaires were used to illustrate how Taiwanese ESL teachers' beliefs changed over 14 weeks. I used the information from section III to create the tentative schedule of the TOPDC. Finally, I compared data in sections V and VI of the pre-

and post-questionnaires in order to explain the diverse aspects of the use of online professional development setting and to understand the variety of attitudes to online teaching and learning.

Transcripts of teachers' interviews

The purpose of using one-to-one face-to-face interviews was to develop a clear understanding of the phenomenon, as seen through the living and teaching experiences of each participant within the educational environment; it also allowed me, as a researcher, to understand participants' individual behaviors and viewpoints. This is in line with Seidman's (2006) claim that interviewing allows researchers to put behavior into context and provides access to an understanding of people's actions.

This interview process included an interview protocol that allowed for flexibility, probing, and follow-up. The interview questions were sent to the participants a week before the one-to-one face-to-face interviews, so that they had sufficient time to review the questions. The interview took place in a public area in the south of Taiwan and lasted for approximately an hour. Interviews were conducted in English. Using the interview process and tape recording the information are direct ways to obtain information about the phenomenon under study and preserve the information for data analysis (Merriam, 2002). Therefore, during this study, all interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Each interview transcript was reviewed for coding, developing themes, and cohering categories for data analysis and interpretation of the findings.

The following interview questions are related to Taiwanese English teachers' expectations and motivation to sustain an online professional development course and their perspectives on the collaborative online professional development activities.

1. Please tell me about your own language teaching experience.
2. Thinking back to any previous professional development courses you may have been involved in, are there any points of conflict between what you were taught and what you have learned from your own experience? Could you please elaborate on that?
3. Apart from the fact that one is online and one is face-to-face, what do you think is the most significant difference between an online professional development course and a face-to-face professional development course?
4. Why did you participate in this online professional development course?
5. What types of activities and instruction were most helpful to you? Why?
6. What types of activities and instruction were less helpful to you? Why?
7. What types of teaching strategies will you be mostly likely to take back to the classroom? Could you please elaborate on that?
8. Which of the topics presented made the greatest impression on you? Why?
9. Do you think the guest speakers impacted on your teaching? How?
10. Can you tell me about any changes that you have made in your teaching recently, for example, during the course of this term? Why you made this change has it been successful?

11. If I were to run this course again, is there anything you would recommend me to change or to keep for the future class?
12. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experience of this course?

Electronic documentation of participation

There were three electronic data sources: email responses, discussion board postings and a blend of asynchronous/synchronous discussion of the guest presentations collected from the TOPDC. The use of emails as a tool in this study, created flexibility, immediacy, and provide speed of communication to both the researcher and the participants. Email communications allow both the researcher and the participants to reply when it is most convenient to them or when they feel comfortable sending their response after thinking it through; however, a disadvantage of emails is that they can be easily deleted or neglected by the receivers. The second asynchronous data source used in this study was the discussion board. The researcher would post selected articles, readings, and writing prompts for the participants to post their responses to. Finally, the third tool/data source, the synchronous audio and video virtual meetings, known as live guest presentations, involved conversations between the invited native English speaking ESL teachers and Taiwanese ESL teachers, and were saved as text-based documents.

Field notes

Text-based field notes describing every activity, conversation and exchange that happened in the TOPDC were recorded (on a computer and paper journal) by the researcher after leading each module.

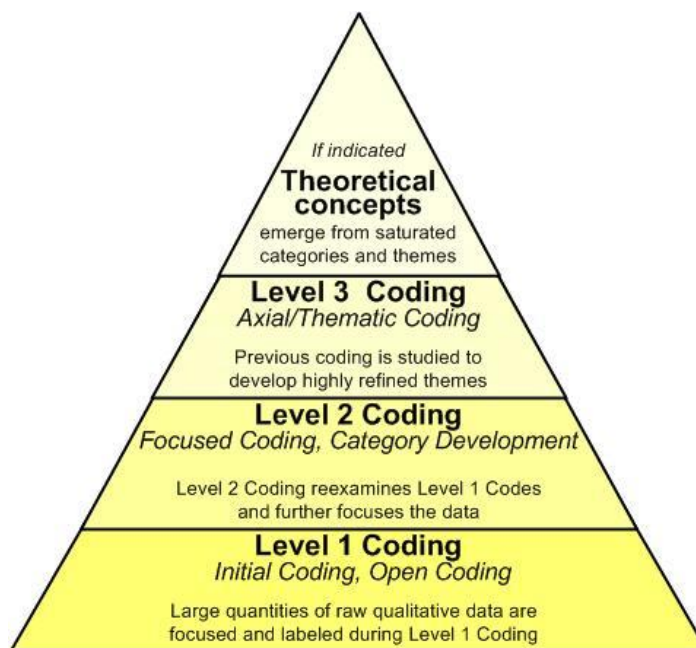
Approach to data analysis

Guest, Namey, and Mitchell (2013) defined qualitative data analysis as working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others. One of the identifying characteristics of qualitative research is the inductive approach to data analysis, wherein data related to the focus of inquiry are collected and analyzed (Patton, 2002). The qualitative data are usually text-based outcomes of interviews, observations, field notes or documents, and the data from activities (Mertens, 2010; Yin, 2009).

In order to convey the meaning and understanding from the qualitative data, there are four levels of coding in qualitative data analysis (see Figure 7). A researcher first prepares the collected data and reads the texts multiple times to examine and establish the meaningful thematic and symbolic content of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Ryan & Bernard, 2000); this is what Hahn (2008) refer to as Level 1 Coding: open coding. It is then followed by devising an audit trail where the researcher identifies chunks of data based on what the participant said and why he/she said it (context of speech); these chunks of data comprise quotable materials that illustrate the theme(s) being described in the study (Ryan & Bernard,

2003). The next step is coding where categories identified during the open coding are re-examined and focused on the data. Using the codes developed in Levels 1 and 2, the researcher compares, combines, links together, and searches for statements that may fit into any of the categories. The coding describes not only the categories but also how they relate with one another (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). More specifically, the researcher acquires a new understanding of the event, activity, situation, or phenomenon being investigated and constructs a conceptual model or theme(s); this is Level 3 Coding: axial/thematic coding (Hahn, 2008; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The final stage of the process is when the researcher translates the findings and interpretations in a report format that closely approximates the reality it represents (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Figure 7: Qualitative Coding Levels (Hahn, 2008)

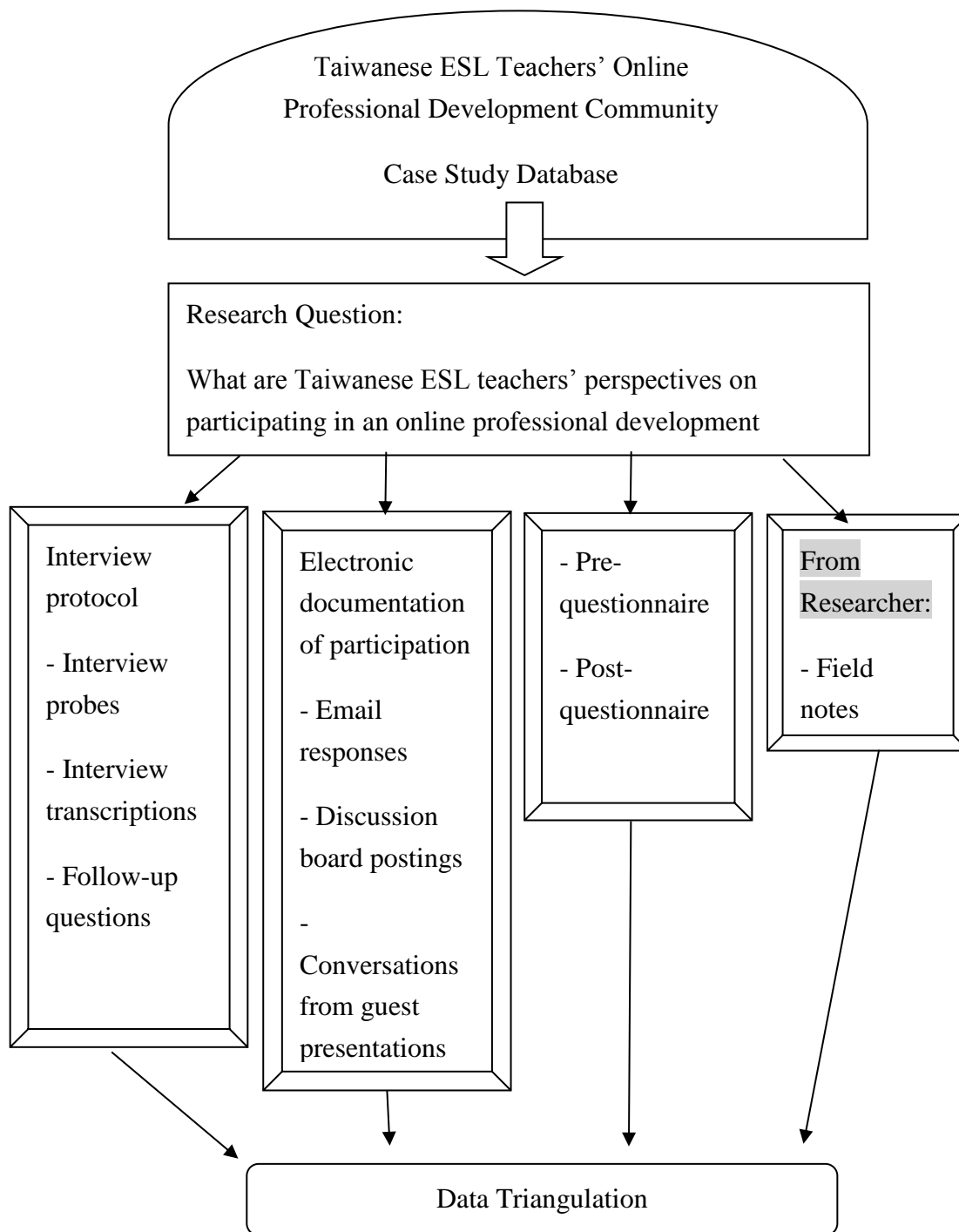


Additionally, the researcher creates a case study database to store and retrieve information assist with the triangulation of the data. In a case study, data are first gathered from multiple sources and then combined in the analysis, rather than handled individually. Each data source is one piece of the “puzzle” that contributes to the researcher’s understanding of the whole phenomenon.

To conduct the data analysis in this way, the process required familiarization with the data from the interviews, the pre- and post-questionnaires, the electronic documentation of participation, and the field notes, in order to integrate all of the information into one database. Therefore, when the TOPDC ended, I first listened to each interview, confirmed my notes, and transcribed the audio-taped interviews. As I completed the interview transcriptions, I compared and contrasted the written texts from each participant and categorized the data depending on the participants’ communications. I reviewed the transcripts and made notes for follow-up questions to make sure the notes conveyed the voices and views of the participants in the TOPDC exactly. Subsequently, I compiled the data from the post-questionnaire, compared with the pre-questionnaire and noted the differences. Next, I gathered the responses from the discussion board, and synthesized my field notes from all the activities in the TOPDC. All the participants were given pseudonyms. All the data sources were saved securely in a password-protected computer, and the use of the database information created in Microsoft Word as text-based transcriptions allowed for more detailed analysis and interpretation. As a result, the case study database allowed for organizing, managing, sorting, and pulling together all the data for the study (see Figure 8).

Themes and concerns developed from the synthesis of the four data sources, using triangulation.

Figure 8: The Case Study Database



The triangulation research strategy, which can occur with data, investigators, theories, and methodologies (Tellis, 1997; Patton, 2002), uses multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). Denzin (1984) introduced four types of triangulation including (a) data source triangulation, which occurs when the researcher looks for the data to remain the same in different contexts, (b) investigator triangulation, which occurs when several investigators examine the same phenomenon, (c) theory triangulation, which occurs when investigators with different viewpoints interpret the same result, and (d) methodological triangulation, which occurs when one approach is followed by another to increase confidence in the interpretation. In this study, I used the data source triangulation strategy to identify themes and concerns in order to answer the research questions.

Note: When conducting a case study, data collection and analysis take place at the same time (Yin, 2009). That is to say, I was able to spend a significant amount of time, in the online professional development community setting for Taiwanese ESL teachers, engaging in data collection with the participants, and studying the central activities, building themes, and analyzing the data in descriptive language. The data collected included the participants' feedback and responses from the pre- and post-questionnaires, one-to-one face-to-face interview transcripts, the electronic documentation of participation, including the participants' responses to the discussion board postings and emails, and the researcher's field notes.

Reliability and validity

According to Rowley (2002) and Yin (2009), researchers should consider validity and reliability as crucial criteria to determine the impact or quality of research findings. As a result, I followed Johnson (1997) and Yin (2009) for ensuring the reliability and validity of this research study.

- **Reliability:** Reliability was addressed in this study by the use of a case study protocol (Yin, 2009) outlining each step of the processes. In addition, I developed a case study database (Yin, 2009) to track and organize data sources.
- **Descriptive validity:** This refers to the factual accuracy in reporting descriptive information by the researcher (Johnson, 1997). In this study, I used field notes to record events as they happened during the TOPDC. This allowed me to use direct quotes from the participants with accuracy, avoiding research bias.
- **Construct validity:** This study used multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009): pre- and post-questionnaires, interviews, electronic documentations of participation, and field notes to ensure the data collection was convergent lines of the participants' perspectives on engaging in the TOPDC.
- **Internal validity:** This goal is to match reality and an understanding of the perspectives of the people who involved in the phenomenon (Johnson, 1997).

According to Johnson (1997), data triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources using a single method. Thus, I used data triangulation to improve the internal validity in this study (Johnson, 1997; Yin, 2009).

- External validity: This test is not applicable to this study because the purpose of the study is not to generalize from the research findings to other people and setting (Johnson, 1997).

Summary

In order to answer the research questions, the primary data for this study were collected using four instruments: interviews, pre- and post-questionnaires, electronic documentation of participation, and field notes related to online professional development activities designed for Taiwanese ESL teachers. The interview questions were sent to the participants a week before the interviews. The participants gave verbal responses and also were given sufficient time to respond to each question in English. Each interview was recorded and transcribed for later analysis. The follow-up questions were formulated with the intention of eliciting detailed information about the particular teaching strategies and techniques that Taiwanese ESL teachers were implementing into their classrooms. In order to increase the reliability of the interview data, the transcripts and responses were checked and rechecked. The data obtained from the electronic documentation of participation revealed Taiwanese ESL teachers' direct voice in relation to attending online professional development activities, and the reports of field notes provided an overview of which teaching strategies, techniques and skills Taiwanese ESL teachers needed to be included in professional development activities; both data sources concurred with the responses gathered from the interviews. As a result, the validity of the themes and findings was increased. Questionnaires were distributed once at the start of the study, and then again at the end, to increase the validity and reliability of the

study. I sought out common themes and concerns, which work essentially to ensure the validity and reliability of the four instruments, and utilized these common themes and concerns to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND RESULTS

In this chapter, we discover how four Taiwanese ESL teachers perceived their online professional development experience. Beginning with the plans and procedures for the online professional development course known as the Taiwanese ESL Teachers' Online Professional Development Community (TOPDC), the context is set for understanding what I learned from Caron, Lara, Fay, and Penney (pseudonyms) during the 14 weeks we were online together, they as teacher-participants and I as the instructor-researcher.

Context: From Face-to-Face to Online

I met my participants while engaged as a co-facilitator in a face-to-face teachers' professional development course. My colleague April Niemela, from Michigan State University, and I conducted this face-to-face class over the course of three weeks in August 2012 at the National Sun Yat-sen University in the south of Taiwan. Dr. Shu-ching Yang, a professor at the Institute of Education at National Sun Yat-sen University, was the director for the course. This professional development course was specifically for Taiwanese secondary ESL teachers and focused on teaching beliefs, as well as teaching techniques and building one's research-based knowledge with regard to the teaching of English as a second language.

Participants in the face-to-face professional development course included eight licensed English teachers from secondary schools, one doctoral student from the Institute of Education at National Sun Yat-sen University, and one assistant professor from Kaohsiung

Medical University. Class was Monday through Friday, from 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., and each day began with a presentation by April and me. Afterwards, the teachers would engage in small group discussions, later coming together as a whole class again in order to share their discoveries. In the latter part of the course, there were also group presentations and individual teaching demonstrations. Community was built as a result of teachers' growing confidence in sharing ideas, opinions, thoughts, and experiences in a safe open-minded environment.

At the conclusion of the three-week course, the eight secondary teachers were asked if they would like to volunteer for the 14-week Taiwanese ESL Teachers' Online Professional Development Community (TOPDC) in which they would discuss issues pertaining to ESL teaching pedagogies, share experiences, and be encouraged to learn from each other. In addition, they would be able to provide social, cultural, and emotional support to one another. All eight teachers chose to participate and later signed consent forms as the TOPDC was also a research project. However, four of the teachers withdrew their consent during the first week of the course. They shared with me that they were anxious about their heavy teaching loads during the academic year, and they did not feel they could participate. Completing the 14-week TOPDC was seen as an extra work for them. What is more, they added that they would prefer to join in one-day conferences or half-day workshops rather than a long-term professional development course, whether it was delivered online or face-to-face. Thus, the online course proceeded with four teacher-participants.

The TOPDC

There were five modules or topics in the TOPDC, and the course was structured using two approaches. The first approach involved asynchronous activities that included reading academic articles on some aspect of English instruction, reflecting, and then responding to various writing prompts by posting to an online discussion board. The prompts encouraged participants to examine their teaching practices and report on them, including sharing specific challenges or difficulties. This was a space in which the participants explored English language teaching and learning issues, solved problems, and sought out answers and support. The participants were usually asked to respond to a minimum of two other participants in the online discussion board, although they were welcome to respond more.

The second approach was comprised of synchronous activities that took place once a month via CourseSites Live. These synchronous activities started at 5 p.m. on Saturday in Moscow, Idaho, which was 8 a.m. on Sunday in Taiwan and lasted for approximately 60-90 minutes. The synchronous activities included American ESL instructors who were native English speaking ESL teachers. I had prearranged for these guests to join us and give presentations related to the topic of each module; each guest speaker was given the freedom to determine the specifics of what they wanted to present. In addition, the guests shared their teaching experiences, including their personal and cultural experiences with international students. Time was also allotted for a question-and-answer period. After each event, participants posted their reflections to a discussion board and engaged in further conversation.

The modules of the TOPDC

The five modules of the TOPDC were delivered over a period of 14 weeks, from September to December 2012. Although I was the instructor–researcher for the course, the topic for each module was determined in the following way:

- a. The results of section III of the pre-questionnaire, which was focused on teachers' interests and needs, were reviewed and collated.
- b. These results were sent to each participant via email to confirm what I understood to be their professional development interests.
- c. The participants replied and I set the topics based on their feedback.

Thus, based on the participants' responses, three broad topics emerged: speaking-listening, writing, and grammar. And while not a mirror image of the four standard ESL language domains, according to the professional association for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (speaking, listening, reading, writing) the topics were clearly closely aligned (TESOL, 2006).

It is important to note that the design of the activities in the TOPDC was based on the teacher-participants' responses and feedback. The activities of Modules 1 and 2 were determined by the instructor-researcher at the beginning of the course; the next step in the design for Modules 3, 4, and 5 was decided upon after discussions with the teacher-participants either at the end of the synchronous activities or via e-mail and Skype. Thus, the teacher-participants were not only the learners but also the creators in the TOPDC.

The following is an outline of each module including readings and activities. Note that the materials (i.e., handouts, PowerPoints) for Modules 2, 3, and 5 were sent to me by the guest speakers and I forwarded them to the teachers the week before the relevant module started.

- Module 1: Learning and Teaching in An Online Community – asynchronous.

Reading articles:

1. Please read **ONE** page:

Palmer, P. J. (2007). Teaching in community. In P. J. Palmer (Ed.), *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life* (pp.119-120). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

2. Please read **FIVE** pages: the first section on **page 149**, New Topics of Conversation & the second section on **page 155**, Ground Rules for Dialogue, in

Palmer, P. J. (2007). Learning in community. In P. J. Palmer (Ed.), *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life* (pp.149-161). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Writing prompts:

After your reading, please think about these questions. Choose **ONE** that you will respond to in the discussion forum.

1. What are the "great things" in this community that we've developed over the summer? How do we keep these great things?
2. Do you have a coat with two pockets? If so, what do you have in each pocket? What do you bring into your class?
3. In what ways will you build a community in your class this semester? What suggestions from this week's readings will you use and why?

- Module 2: Teaching English Listening & Speaking – synchronous.

Guest speaker, Debbie Johnson, is an ESL instructor with the Intensive American Language Center (IALC) at Washington State University and a master's degree in TESOL. She has had approximately four years teaching experience with international students.

- ◆ The content of the presentation included (a) activities for practicing listening and speaking skills, (b) the use of oral presentation/practice rubric, (c) teaching listening comprehension with different tools, such as authentic materials and videos/ short clips.

- Module 3: Teaching English Writing – synchronous.

Guest speaker, Katherine Hellmann, is the associate direction in the Office of International Programs at Washington State University and currently completing a doctoral degree in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at the University of Idaho. She has had eight years teaching experience with international students.

- ◆ The content of the presentation included (a) content-based writing, (b) collaborative writing strategies/activities, and (c) the idea of writer's workshop.

- Module 4: Writer's Workshop – asynchronous.

A follow-up reading and writing activity and focused on writer's workshop that we discussed in Module 3.

Reading article:

Lain, S. (2007). Reaffirming the writing workshop for young adolescents.

Voices from the Middle, 14(3), 20-28.

◆ Two websites for you to review:

How to Start a Writer's Workshop:

<http://teachers.net/lessons/posts/681.html>

Writing Workshop:

http://www.busyteacherscafe.com/literacy/writing_workshop.html

Writing Prompts:

After your reading, please think about these questions. Choose **ONE** that you will respond to in the discussion forum.

1. What is your opinion on doing Writer's Workshop?
2. Do you have any plan for doing Writer's Workshop in your class? How?

- Module 5: Teaching English Grammar – synchronous.

Guest speaker, Barbara Keyes, is a master ESL instructor with the American Language and Culture Program (ALCP) at the University of Idaho and a master's degree in TESOL. She has had approximately 15 years teaching experience with international students.

- ◆ The content of the presentation included (a) the steps of teaching verb tenses, and (b) activities for practicing tenses in English.

To Understand Teacher-Participants' Context

Before discussing the findings of this study, it is important to develop an understanding of the teacher-participants' context with regard to their English language teaching and learning environments, classroom settings, and students' behaviors and attitudes. In Taiwan, junior high school students, whose ages range from 12-15 years old, are placed in a "normal class grouping" (MOE, 2012). That is, there are approximately 40 students with different academic competencies in a classroom and their abilities are expected to fall along a bell curve. Regarding students' academic competencies, some students may also go to cram schools for the supplementary course work in English, mathematics, sciences, and Chinese in particular; but some families can't afford the tuition for their children. Recall that a cram school is a private institute that students attend after their regular school. Parents pay tuition in order for their children to receive additional learning support, from assistance with homework to supplementary course work, in order to improve their chances for better grades and test scores. Therefore, it is challenge for teachers to use the same level of teaching materials/textbooks as the students who enter their classrooms come with widely different academic competencies.

By contrast, senior high school and senior vocational school students, whose ages range from 15-18 years old, are required to have taken an "academic attainment test" (MOE, 2012) in their last year of junior high school and choose either a senior high school or a senior vocational school in which to study. However, some of the students who are in a vocational high school have been referred there because of their lower test scores in the

academic attainment test or because they are not skilled in academic subjects (i.e., Chinese, English, mathematics, and sciences). Overall, though, the approximately 45 students in classes in a senior high or a vocational high school will all have similar academic competencies.

Teaching approaches used in English classes

It is important to note that “giving lectures” in the Taiwanese context means that the teacher talks to the class without any interaction with students or interruptions by the students. As well, “playing games” in a Taiwanese classroom involves the teacher grouping the students into several teams and asking questions as a method to review lectures and prepare for exams. The students compete with each other to get points or bonuses, which the teacher can define as she or he wishes.

Issues with Taiwanese students’ discipline

It is noteworthy that all the teacher-participants stated that their biggest challenge in the classroom was student discipline/classroom management. This was the case regardless of their students’ English language proficiency or perceived motivation for learning. One reason for this problem with student behavior, according to the participants, is the change that occurred in 2006 when the *Educational Fundamental Act* was reformed by the Legislative Yuan (Legislative Yuan, 2006) and announced by the Ministry of Education (MOE). After this reform, corporal punishment was no longer allowed in the classroom. As one teacher-participant revealed,

“The MOE and educators in Taiwan held the conference to in-service teachers to advocate “*the Education of Love*” and no punishment in school. Then students’ discipline becomes a serious issue in school. When students do not follow the instructions, disturb the lectures, or disobedience to the teachers, there is no penalty the teachers can do to the students.”

On the way teacher-participants describe English language learning

In the portraits to follow, the teacher-participants refer to their students’ English language learning proficiency in terms such as “low”, “intermediate”, and “high” (or various combinations of these terms). These labels, as well as descriptions referring to learning motivation, are based on the teacher-participants’ personal experience with teaching English and may be very different from one person to another. In terms of English proficiency there is similar terminology used by the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT).

In Taiwan the GEPT, which was developed by the Language Training and Testing Center (LTTC) in 2002, is a test of English language proficiency that was supported by the MOE in 1999. There are five levels of the test currently being administered: Elementary, Intermediate, High-intermediate, Advanced, and Superior. Each level includes two stages. In the first stage, examinees take a listening comprehension test and a reading comprehension test. Those who pass the first stage are allowed to go on to the next stage and take a speaking test and a writing test. Examinees who pass both stages of a GEPT level receive a report, indicating the test score and whether it was a pass or fail, and a certificate. The GEPT Elementary level test is presumed to be appropriate for students who have studied English up through to junior high school. The GEPT Intermediate level test is meant for high school graduates or university freshman. The GEPT High-intermediate level test is generally for

university graduates whose major in English (LTTC, 2012). The GEPT Advanced level and Superior level tests are rarely taken; people who might want to demonstrate their high level of proficiency usually prefer to take the TOEFL as it is more internationally recognized and is accepted by more foreign schools on admission applications. Note that the GEPT is a two-step test compared to the TOEFL in which examinees complete all portions in one setting. Yet, despite the fact that the GEPT is widespread and encouraged by the government and schools, there is not an actual required test for primary or secondary students.

Teacher–Participants: Four Self-Directed Taiwanese Teachers

In my mind, the four women who participated in the TOPDC are independent thinkers and very concerned with developing their teacher selves. That is to say, even though they may have heavy teaching loads at their schools, they still aspire to continue their professional growth. They seem to know exactly what their goals are and want to work towards reaching these goals. I have described these teacher-participants, Caron, Lara, Fay, and Penney, as self-directed teachers because they each seem to have strong teaching ideals and values, yet they are also open to listening to others' experiences and opinions, and ultimately are able and willing to determine what to take back to their own classes. And, they each view professional development as crucial to their teaching careers.

“I am always interested in teachers' professional development activities, and I think it is important for a teacher to keep learning new or different teaching ideas.”

“I like it [the TOPDC] even though I have to get up early. It's ok and I can force myself to wake up early. It's not an important issue or problem.”

“I found that I should start to improve my English ability, and I thought I have many things to learn to improve my teaching. Sometimes I feel depressed with my teaching, so I want to find some answers.”

“...I think this is a good chance for me to refresh my English competencies. I used English everyday as I was a college student, but now I don't have that environment. I think practice makes me perfect. Joining in this professional development course is for personal improvement and development.”

Caron

Even though Caron was the youngest and the novice teacher in this course, she kept an open-mind towards the others and also eagerly shared her thoughts and opinions during the professional development activities. She had a heavy teaching load: 24 teaching hours per week for each of her two junior high school classes (which were on different grade levels), and one extracurricular club that she led on Wednesdays. Yet, despite her busy schedule when she arrived online she always had a smile on her face and was willing to participate in any type of professional development activity. This was her first time attending a long-term online professional development course.

Caron stated that the students who were in her junior high school classes were learners with low proficiency and low motivation with regard to English learning. Thus, she would usually use Chinese to teach her students rather than English. Her teaching style generally involved giving lectures as well as playing games related to the content of the English textbooks used in her classes.

“Because many of my junior high school students are low proficiency English learners, they may have difficulties with alphabet and also some of them do not have many motivations. Some of them even sleep in class. They may be a little bit depressing, but I try to make them like English as much as I can...when I play the games with them, they may shout or run around the classroom during the games; then they are out of control.

In junior high school if I speak all English, they might just fall asleep. It's kind of day dreaming if I only use English in class. If I want them to cooperate in class, I have to use Chinese to teach the lesson otherwise they won't listen to the lecture. Some of them just said that they are Taiwanese, why should they study English? Maybe they might not find the job related to English..."

Lara

Prior to her current teaching position, Lara had had a unique English teaching experience: she taught at a cram school for three years. She stated that during her time teaching at the cram school, she had to prepare a variety of curricula and academic activities to increase students' learning motivation and keep their interests. Thus, Lara drove herself to attend workshops and conference presentations as much as possible in order to learn new teaching techniques. This was her first time engaging in a long-term online professional development course.

Lara is currently teaching English conversation classes at a senior vocational school in southern Taiwan. She described the students in her senior vocational school classes as learners with intermediate proficiency with regard to English learning. As a result, she would usually make teaching materials (i.e., handouts, worksheets) and use bilingual instruction (both Chinese and English) to teach her students. She believed that using multimedia tools, doing group discussions, and inviting guest speakers were some of the best ways to keep students interested in learning English.

"At my school, we have textbook, but I rarely use it. I usually make my teaching materials like worksheets and handouts for each lesson which topics are correlated to the textbook. I teach English conversation course to the students whose major is English at the vocational high school. Their English level is intermediate level, so I use bilingual in class. The purpose of my course is to help students understand English usage in daily life, and increase their

learning motivation and interests. Therefore, I usually have group presentation, watch the clips or videos, invite guest speech, and do group discussions.”

Fay

Fay is a very self-confident English teacher, seeing herself as organized and efficient as well as effective. Before participating in the TOPDC, she had tried an activity that used blog postings as a way to share teaching techniques. Participants could read about different teaching activities however, there was no interaction between the participants or with the instructor.

Fay taught English in senior high school classes for two years with students having high motivation and high proficiency with regard to English learning. At the time, she gave lectures and handouts to the students. Now, however, Fay teaches English at a senior vocational school in the south of Taiwan. She described her students as learners with low intermediate proficiency with regard to English learning and, as a result, she would usually use Chinese to teach her students. Her teaching style commonly involved giving lectures and engaging in playing games or ‘small talk’ where individual students could choose to respond. “I’ve been teaching English about 5 years...in different senior and vocational high schools. Both are differences including behaviors and students’ self-discipline varies from school to school. I think senior high students behave better than vocational high school students. They can pay more attention in class. They know they want to study for future test in 2 years. They have higher motivation than vocational students.

“When I give lectures to vocational high school students, I have to play games with them; otherwise, they would fall asleep in class. They want more activities or small talk in class; otherwise, they can’t concentrate in class. Most of the activities are not academic one, just for vocational students to keep interests in class.”

Penney

Penney also had prior experience with an online professional development activity where she listened to recorded seminars from a website, but there was no interaction with other participants or the instructor. At the time of her participation in the TOPDC, she was also studying for her master's degree and teaching at a senior high school.

Penney had the most teaching experience of all the participants. She had taught English on a variety of levels for approximately 11½ years. She recognized that teaching a senior vocational school class was the most challenging for her because she needed to pay more attention to classroom management and student discipline than teaching her lessons. "The most challenge one is the vocational high school students to me personally because some of them have low motivation. A lot of time has to focus on classroom management and student discipline. I have to keep asking them to be quiet or waking them up."

On the other hand, she described the students who were in her other senior high school classes (not vocational) as learners with high motivation and high proficiency with regard to English learning.

"I think the normal senior high school is less challenge. The students are more motivated and better behaviors."

In addition, Penney found that the students who were in her night school classes were learners with positive learning attitudes and high motivation, but low intermediate proficiency with regard to English learning. Penney would usually use Chinese to teach her students, and her teaching style ordinarily involved giving lectures and handouts in her classes.

"Night school students are more positive. Since many of them are adults, they know what they want to; they're also motivated. Even though their abilities are not as good as those

senior high school students, their attitudes are more positive. However, it's not easy to increase their English abilities because they don't have much basic knowledge. Their language proficiency is low intermediate."

"Normally, I don't make handouts for night school students, but normal senior high school students. I usually gave lectures to my students, too."

Overview of the teacher-participants' backgrounds

The following table summarizes and compares the teacher-participants' backgrounds with regard to teaching English as a second language. Also included are the teacher-participants' views on their students' English language learning, their experience with online professional development, any study abroad experience, and their language fluencies.

I chose to include the latter two aspects of the teacher-participants' backgrounds because I wondered if there might be any difference in teaching styles and beliefs that might be due to differences. However, with only four participants it is not possible to make any such judgments.

Caution was taken with regard to drawing conclusions from the teacher-participants' background information. For example, Laura spent 6 months in the United States and she also uses a greater variety of teaching techniques in her classes and teaches bilingually. However, the techniques she uses and her bilingual instruction may be due to her subject of instruction, which is English conversation. None of the other teacher-participants have English conversation as their main subject.

Table 2: A Comparison of Teacher-Participants' Backgrounds

	Caron	Lara	Fay	Penney
Years of studying English	17.5-20 years	17.5-20 years	17.5-20 years	More than 20 years
Teaching certification	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary
Degree & major	Bachelor's degree, English	Bachelor's degree, English	Bachelor's & Master's degrees, English	Bachelor's degree, English (studying for master's degree)
Years and types of teaching experience	1-3 years - 1 year tutoring in junior high level - 7 months practicum in a senior high school - 1.5 years teaching in the same junior high school	5.5-7 years - 3 years at cram school - 1 year practicum in a senior high school - 3 years in the same senior vocational school	5.5-7 years - 1 year practicum in a junior high school - 2 years in a senior high school - 3 years in a senior vocational schools	11.5-13 years - 2 years tutoring in secondary level - 1 year practicum in a junior high school - 11 years teaching at senior high school, comprehensive high school, senior vocational school and night school
Current teaching level	Junior high school	Senior vocational school	Senior vocational school	Senior high school
Students' English language level (currently)	Junior high students: low proficiency & low motivation	Senior vocational students: intermediate level	Senior vocational students: low intermediate level	Senior high students: high proficiency & high motivation

(Table 2 continues)

(Table 2 continued)

	Caron	Lara	Fay	Penney
Students' English language level (prior experience)	Senior high students: high proficiency	No data	Senior high students: high motivation & high proficiency	Senior vocational students: low motivation Night school students: positive attitudes & high motivation, but low intermediate level
Language used to teach English	Chinese	Bilingual instruction (Chinese & English)	Chinese	Chinese
Teaching styles before the TOPDC	- lecture - games	- handouts - using multimedia tools - guest presentations - group discussions	- lecture - handouts - small talk	- lecture - handouts
Interests & needs	Speaking, Writing, Grammar, Listening	Speaking, Writing, Grammar, Revising	Speaking, Writing, Reading, Conferencing	Speaking, Grammar, Listening
The biggest challenge in their teaching	Students' discipline (classroom management) & learning motivation	Students' discipline (classroom management)	Students' discipline (classroom management)	Students' discipline (classroom management)
Online PD experience	No	No	Yes. Blog postings	Yes. Recorded seminars from a website

(Table 2 continues)

(Table 2 continued)

	Caron	Lara	Fay	Penney
Study abroad experience	- 2 months in the U.S. - 1 month in Scotland	6 months in the U.S.	No	No
Language fluencies	Mandarin, Taiwanese, English, Japanese	Mandarin, Taiwanese, English	Mandarin, Taiwanese, English	Mandarin, Taiwanese, English, Hakka

Note. Mandarin, Taiwanese, and Hakka are official languages in Taiwan.

Emerging Themes: Teacher-Participants

There were six primary themes that emerged from the study. These themes are described in detail below, and three notable concerns are highlighted afterwards. It's important to recognize that these findings represent the experiences and perspectives of the teacher-participants and not the instructor-researcher.

Theme 1: Clarifying teaching needs

The teacher-participants gave consideration to what their teaching needs might be throughout their participation in the professional development activities. As one teacher-participant described, she needed to learn more about teaching instruction with regard to listening and to speaking in order to motivate her students, as well as help them to pass a listening comprehension test.

“English listening is considered very important in Taiwan now since the MOE will officially incorporate a listening comprehension test into the college entrance exam in two years. And besides that, I think listening and speaking activities are more attracted to the students. Students are more attracted to the listening and speaking activities because they are able to

hear something and see something. They [listening and speaking activities] will motivate some low-proficiency students or students with lower motivation.”

What is more, the teacher-participants indicated that they had also learned more about ways to support their students in order to increase learning motivation. This seemed to be connected to student engagement and involvement in classroom learning activities.

“I used to lecture a lot, actually lecturing all the time. But now I spend more time on doing interactive activities and using different teaching strategies in my classes because my students told me it’s more interesting than giving lectures. I also think I made my class more interesting and more helpful to the students. I think interactive activities help my students get better ideas and increase their thinking and English language abilities.”

“Now, I understand that the most important thing to students is they need to do the work, not a teacher. So, I start to use different activities in my classes in order to give them a chance to practice and do the work.”

“I learned the idea of grouping students, to group high-proficiency students with low-proficiency ones, from both Debbie and Kate. These students from different language levels help each other to learn and complete the task. Before I tried this way with my students, I was wondering if high-proficiency students would like to help his/her classmates. However, I think this way works well in my class; I didn’t hear any complains about grouping. They look happy to work together and help each other to complete the task.”

Theme 2: Practicing a variety of teaching techniques in the classroom

Authentic applied learning

In order to assist students’ English language learning, the teacher-participants began to consider that students might be more encouraged to fully understand the content of lessons when teaching included more interactive classroom activities and/or more authentic materials. The teacher-participants felt that students learned English more easily when they engaged in these types of activities, especially if they could practice regularly and could interact with other people in the target language.

“I tried the skill that Debbie told us to use - pictures to show the vocabulary to students. I think it’s the same idea as using authentic materials in class. It would be great if students know how to use the word in their lives.”

“I read the article, Reaffirming the Writing Workshop for Young Adolescents, and websites posted on the discussion board. I am thinking of having a writer’s workshop in my second-grade English classes once a week. In this way, my students will have more chances to think and write in English, and they may develop English writing as a habit later.”

“I think students should learn by doing or participating in the activities, not just sit there and listen to teacher talks all the time. They will feel bored very soon if they just listen to the lecture. They need to have the opportunity to talk and use the language they’re learning now.”

“I think it would be interesting if I can have a guest presentation in my English class. I think students would be excited, and they can have a chance to contact with a native speaker. I think which is a benefit for students’ English learning.”

Applying knowledge into real classes

The teacher-participants commented that they had learned a variety of new interactive activities during the TOPDC that they thought were possible to incorporate into their current classes. These included small group work with a given task, jigsaw-ing exercises and, in particular, student discussions that encouraged give-and-take. In point of fact, they had

already begun to integrate these new teaching techniques and skills into their English classes.

“Almost every guest presentations and the reading articles suggested us to have group work, so currently I tried to ask students to collaborate in a group work. I assigned and divided the lesson into different parts, and students selected one for their group.... They have to translate the sentences, pick up some key words and phrases and present to the class next week. They can make either a PowerPoint presentation or write their work on a poster, but the presentation need to have 10 -15 minutes.”

“I incorporate mind mapping which I learned from Debbie into my listening and speaking classes. I grouped my students first and gave each group a topic; they needed to think of related ideas, words or phrases and used their map to say a story in front of the class.”

“I tried the new writing technique from Kate to increase students’ writing interests and improve their skills. Kate suggested us to use pictures to let students retell and write the story without checking a dictionary. So, I arranged my students into groups within different language proficiencies, and they read the pictures clearly, discussed with each other about the pictures, retold the story according to each picture, and wrote down their new story. I am considering asking my students to make a digital story at the end of the semester.”

“I tried the new writing technique with my students. I asked them to read the article and analyze it; they need to paraphrase and summarize the main ideas, write the outline of the text, and share with each other. After that, I think they had more clear ideas and understanding of the article. Their writings also show more organized.”

The use of technologies

In addition, the teacher-participants seemed inclined towards using multimedia equipment (e.g. computers with audio and video capabilities) in their English classes. They were especially interested in the idea of integrating YouTube clips in their classes, and arranging guest presentations for their students.

“After Debbie shared with us to play a short clip to improve students’ listening comprehension, so I played a clip via YouTube and asked students to write down what they hear from the conversation. They can write down a word, a phrase, a sentence, or the main idea. And then I gave them a few minutes to discuss. I think they like this activity, so now I play a clip around 2-3 minutes before I start the lecture. My students are doing better and better. Some of them can tell the main idea about the conversation; some can have several sentences.”

The teacher-participants noted that they would also like to introduce online discussion boards in their English classes. They felt that an online discussion board would be a good approach for students who are too shy to speak up or ask a question in public because students would have a place to share their opinions and thoughts through their words.

“I think an online discussion board can become a communicative tool for a teacher and students. Because some students in a face-to-face environment are too shy to ask questions or

are not willing to speak out; however, in the web-based environment students may be more willing to ask questions because they do not need to face the teacher/instructor directly.”

“As I am thinking to have a writer’s workshop to my second-grade students, I plan to give them 10-15 minutes to write in class and post their work twice a month to the online discussion board for sharing. Most students in my classes are not willing to talk in public, so I believe my students can have a new chance to understand each other via the discussion board.”

“When I wrote my thoughts and posted into the discussion board. I thought of Kate’s suggestion that students support to have more chances to write in order to improve their writing skills. So, I would like to have an online discussion board for my students because first, there is always not having enough time to do in-class discussion with them. Second, I think my students can share their thoughts with each other and also have an opportunity to write without time or grades pressure on the discussion board.”

Theme 3: Developing a preference for an interactive learning environment

After completing the TOPDC, the teacher-participants stated that they would like to create more interactive learning environments in their classes. Their experience in trying out various teaching techniques during the TOPDC course seemed to have influenced their views in terms of what can make for a more effective learning environment.

“I found out that my students become more active in my class as I encourage them to work together, so I want to create an interactive learning classroom.”

“I want to develop an interactive learning environment to my students. The teacher may not do the lecture all the time, but ask students to share their opinions and they can learn from each other.”

“I think it’s important for teachers to build an interactive learning environment for students, especially in our culture, we used to listen to the lecture without discussion. Now, I think if students have a chance to work together, discuss a topic to each other, and share their thoughts, it may be a good thing to their learning.”

Interestingly, I found that the teacher-participants themselves tended to be more engaged in the guest presentations. This seems to have been because of the interactive environment, which they thought resembled a face-to-face setting. This may also have influenced their changing perspectives with regard to learning environments.

“...In our professional development course, the live guest presentations are a sort of interactive learning environment: we [Taiwanese ESL teachers] had a chance to talk to each other, and all the speakers provided us a lot of useful information and interactive activities.... This is the same situation when we are in the face-to-face course.”

Theme 4: The motivation for teachers' professional development

Intrinsic motivation

One clear motivation for participation in the TOPDC was the teacher-participants' belief that a teacher should receive appropriate training to speak effectively when teaching English to students and, as such, the inclusion of native English speaking ESL teachers as guests was seen to be a potentially valuable experience. They also indicated that their reasons for participating in the TOPDC included the desire to become better English teachers overall, inspiring their students through the use of new teaching techniques, strategies, and pedagogies.

“I also think teachers should learn how to talk and teach effectively in class.”

“I think that the guest speakers who provided us their teaching techniques and activities are really kind. Their speeches inspire me a lot in teaching.”

“I want to learn more teaching techniques and may be able to change my teaching style. For example, Barbara's speech shot some lights on me. I didn't know that the grammar can be explained very clearly in English language. I was taught the English grammar in Chinese and used to teach it in Chinese to my students as well. But now I understand that it can be explained in English very clearly as well.”

“I want my students can learn some knowledge in my class as well as they enjoy learning English. I want to become a better English teacher.”

“Because I am not a native speaker, there is some challenge for me to use English to teach. ...However, when I learn knowledge in English directly, I can understand English logical well, and I think can interpret the content in English as well. I want to inspire my students and become a good teacher.”

“I want my teaching can inspire my students’ learning. I want to meet another teacher; not only share with experience, but also learn from other teachers.”

“I want to become an excellent English teacher, so I have to train myself. I have to increase my expertise and professional knowledge. I want to learn new and different teaching techniques.”

Extrinsic motivation

Throughout the TOPDC, the teacher-participants’ personal beliefs and teaching attitudes evolved into ones that embraced a student-centered teaching model. They thought that the TOPDC had increased their creativity with regard to instruction, and improved their confidence in teaching English.

“After this online professional development course, I think I tried more to understand every student’s ability, so I asked them to tell me about their learning background on the first day of class. I also tried to understand what every student’s needs, so I asked them to write about their expectation in my English class. I tried to make my activities meet most of students’ interests. For example, they wanted me to play movies in class, so I chose a movie, which is related to the lesson. I played *The Other Boleyn Girl*, and I used it to introduce the history of England and the background of King Henry VIII. So I think my students liked the movie, and they understood the history of another country in English. They had more interests in learning English than before.”

“I think this online professional development course is good for me because I had opportunities to interact with native speakers. I think this is a good chance for me to refresh my English competencies. I used English everyday as I was a college student, but now I don’t have that environment. I think practice makes me perfect. Joining in this professional development course is for personal improvement and development.”

“I think it’s not difficult to make changes as long as I know the benefits, the potential benefits to the teaching strategies or teaching methods. As I participate in the professional development activities, I can learn more ideas, more perspectives on English teaching. It’s also important to know, through experiences, using different strategies to different context and students. I think this is the important reason to participate in a professional development for me.”

One teacher-participant shared with me that she felt the guest speaker had been a great influence on her teaching beliefs. She had noticed the need for teaching resources written in the English languages, as well as a need to adjust the content of her classes.

“As Barbara mentioned that we need to have at least one grammar book, like a reference book, which is written in English. I think it’s a good idea, so I bought one after the guest presentation. Even though I did not focus on teaching English grammar in my class, I am trying to add in a little bit grammar instructions and using English to interpret the rules and usage to students. How surprising me is my students like this way to explain English grammar.”

Theme 5: Understanding the merits of an online course

All the teachers claimed that this was their first time attending an online professional development course (OPDC) involving real communication and collaboration with other teachers who were located at a distance. The teacher-participants agreed that it would be beneficial if they could have more opportunities to be involved in OPDCs. They noted that the TOPDC not only worked well with their personal schedules, but also enabled them to attend classes more frequently than in traditional courses. They reflected that it was easy and flexible for them to attend the TOPDC via the Internet, adding that they could read the articles which were posted on the discussion board at anytime. In addition, they were also able to decide the date for each guest presentation.

“I think online professional development is convenient, and it can save traveling time. I can read the articles which posted on the discussion board anytime, so I think the time is more flexible.”

“I think online professional development has its own advantage because it is not limited to a specific location. We can just turn on the computer, log in, and participate in the course.”

“In terms of the distance, this online professional development course took place at my home, and time is more flexible. It saves my time: no need to dress up or spend time in traffic.”

One teacher-participant also noted that, as well as convenience, the TOPDC helped them save money because they were not required to pay any registration fees to attend the course. “...However, I need to spend extra money on registration, and plan my time to attend a face-to-face professional development course, conference, and workshop.”

The teacher-participants also observed that an online course for their own students would allow them to provide more and different teaching resources than a face-to-face course might because the teacher and students can upload and share a variety of teaching materials, websites, articles, and exercises in a web-based classroom.

“I think that the online course can help students’ self-learning. It can provide more choices and resources to students as a teacher upload the materials. For example, a teacher can provide English learning websites to students, and ask them to do exercise at home. It’s very convenient.”

“...Besides, the online course can provide different learning materials and exercises for students. Nowadays, they like to use computer, so I think this is a good way to ask them to do exercise with their computer.”

Additionally, the teacher-participants hoped not only to increase their own use of an OPDC but also planned to recommend an OPDC to their colleagues.

“I think the online professional development is a new way to learn teaching knowledge and professional skills. I’m glad I decided to join in this course. I would like to tell my colleague to join us next time.”

“I think this is a good course, and I have learned a lot new teaching skills. If you run this online course next semester, I would like to invite my classmates to attend the course. They are also English teachers.”

The teacher-participants determined that another important aspect of online courses was that they could build trust with the other members of their online community; they appreciated that the other teachers were able to provide supportive feedback, thoughtful and reflective conversations, and valuable discussions about real-life events from a distance.

“I think people can build trust and real communications in an online learning community. Like our professional development community, we had chance to talk with one another. It is a warm place to share thoughts with peers, and learn new things from them.”

“I think the both professional development courses [the face-to-face professional development course in summer 2012 and the TOPDC] are provided safe and comfortable environment for me to share my thoughts and opinions with others. Besides, I think every teacher is also open-minded and willing to help others in both courses. I like that we support and encourage each other to become a better English teacher.”

“I think this online professional development community is a comfortable place to learn because every teacher supports each other.”

“...Even great is our friends had a chance to share each classroom situation, and we can support each other.”

To illustrate some of the advantages of an online course, consider the following which took place during Module 2. It illustrates how quickly the teacher-participant was able to appropriate new knowledge, modify it and then share it with her peer. In some face-to-face professional development courses offered in Taiwan there is little time spent on ensuring participants are confident and capable of applying what they are supposed to be learning. In addition, there may be little time for teachers to share, much less support each other’s learning.

This meeting was the first online, synchronous live guest presentation and the topic was “English listening and speaking”. Carol, one of the teacher-participants, arrived to the session late due to technical difficulties (one of the disadvantages!). However, when she asked, “How to encourage students to speak English to each other like daily exercise?” It was not the guest speaker who replied. Instead it was Faye who replied, “You can ask students to have a conversation presentation for each class or each week and also give a grade on their conversation presentation.” Faye, another teacher-participant, had just learned a new teaching technique from the guest speaker and had already considered how to use the technique with her students. As a result she was able to assist Carol, immediately supporting her learning.

Theme 6: The importance of immediacy behaviors

The teacher-participants commented that taking part in the TOPDC was neither boring nor produced anxiety as long as they could interact with the guest speaker(s), the instructor, or their peers. However, they noted that they would feel uncomfortable in OPDCs if they could not receive immediate responses when they reported difficulties or problems, as occurs in asynchronous activities. They especially appreciated the immediate feedback and suggestions from the guest speakers.

It is important to understand that the teacher-participants were not only educated in a face-to-face learning environment, but also have only experienced teaching in a face-to-face classroom. Regarding their learning and teaching experiences, they could always receive instructor immediacy behaviors. Immediacy behaviors are defined as nonverbal interaction

with other (Meharabian, 1969) includes eye contact, vocal expressiveness, gestures, smiling, touch, and positive head nods, and verbal interaction (Gorham, 1988) includes the use of humor, frequent use of student name, encouragement of discussion, feedback, sharing of personal example, using “our” instead of “my”, and so forth. The online activities in the TOPDC also included verbal and nonverbal responses.

“I like this online professional development because I have an opportunity to interact with a native speaker.... I don’t feel anxiety when I can understand what the guest speakers said. I enjoy learning in this interactive community.”

“I felt great when I have a question; I received immediate feedback and answers from the guest speakers. When I sent out my wondering via email, I received the reply from the instructor very quick.”

“I can see a teacher in the face-to-face one, and I feel more comfortable to talk about my experience because the teacher’s smile and encouragement make me feel more confident.”

What is more, the teacher-participants felt that it was interesting in the TOPDC, especially as they had an opportunity to interact with English language teachers from Taiwan and the United States of America.

“The reason for me to keep continuing to join the online professional development is I enjoy the interaction between you, April, Debbie, Kate, and Barbara. As I participated in the live guest presentations, all the guest speakers answered my questions about English teaching strategies. I like the communications in this online professional development course.”

“I appreciate that the guest speakers did not talk to themselves; they asked questions, talked to us, gave us suggestions, and helped us improve our teaching skills. They were also willing to answer our questions.”

“I like the guest speakers; they are kind, open-minded and willing to share their experiences with us. I was thankful their generosity.”

Other Notable Concerns

The teacher-participants revealed their perspectives on pursuing the activities in the TOPDC and in doing so they also uncovered the following concerns regarding professional development activities in general and their teaching environments in particular.

Concern 1: There is a gap between learning professional development activities and applying them in the classroom.

The teacher-participants engaged in different types of professional development courses/programs, but incorporating the activities, which they had learned in the professional development courses/programs, into their own classes was a different matter. They claimed that they could not simply apply what they had learned from professional development workshops or conference presentations to their classrooms the next day. They felt that some presenters might not understand their teaching context, so they had to modify the activities and teaching techniques later.

“...From my other professional development experience, there were also some experienced teachers held English writing workshops to talk about how to help senior high school students get better/higher grades in English writing test. However, I think there are some conflicts between what they tried to teach us, and what I have to complete in my real classroom. Because the presenters are experienced teachers, and those who have kept trying the techniques in his/her classroom for many times, they showed really maturely results. So they performed the techniques fluently, perfectly and successful, but in fact I don't think I can do like them because I didn't try such teaching techniques before.”

“From my professional development experience, there are some of the principles are not easy to implement into specific classrooms. For example, all [whole] English principle is not suitable for low-level students. So, I use Chinese in the low-level classroom.

“In terms of teaching methods, I think the intention of communicative language teaching method is very good, but I tried to implement it into my classroom; I think the students’

abilities are not meet the standard. I think I should adopt the teaching method in some ways to fit my students' levels.”

“After Debbie’s presentation, I asked my first grade students to present a dialogue, conversation, or acting out to encourage them to speak in English, but they are not able to do it. Their English proficiency is not good enough to carry that out. I should adopt the idea and redesign the activity.”

Concern 2: There is a conflict between teaching beliefs and teaching reality.

Based on the teacher-participants’ feedback, they are willing to attend professional development activities/ courses/ workshops during their own time; however, they sometimes have some conflicts between what they learned from experts and how they applied their new skills into their classes.

One of the teacher-participants mentioned that she could understand that it would be beneficial for her students if she used English to teach English grammar; however, she had serious concern for her classroom situation. It is worth noting that in Taiwan there is a scheduled curriculum for each subject, and there are three examinations and several tests during a semester. With regard to the scheduled curriculum for English subject in secondary schools, there are 12 lessons for a semester, and an English teacher has to teach four lessons for each examination.

A TEACHER-PARTICIPANT:

Barbara’s speech shot some lights on me. I didn’t know that the grammar can be explained very clearly in English language. I was taught the English grammar in Chinese and used to teach it in Chinese to my students as well. But now I understand that it can be explained in English very clearly as well.

THE INSTRUCTOR-RESEARCHER:

Are you willing to use English to explain English grammar for your students now?

A TEACHER-PARTICIPANT:

Hmm...I would like to but in order to save time, I think I will still use Chinese to explain the grammar rules first because they can get the ideas very fast, in a very short time. Because I need to finish the specific lessons before each exam, and I usually ran out of time to interpret each lesson, I don't think I have time to explain each rule or sentences in English to my students. But as I taught English reading to the third grade senior high school students, I sometimes spoke English to them, and they could understand me well. They didn't complain it (using English), but became silent. Sometimes, a few students responded in a short answer in small volume.

Another teacher-participant explained that when she was a substitute teacher at a senior high school, it was hard for her to design the materials or lesson plans with multimedia tools due to a lack of time for preparation. It was also a challenge for her to complete a project with her students.

“As I was a substitute teacher, I had many classes to teach, and all of them were in different grades. I was thinking to make PowerPoint to each lesson, but it was too hard to make because I didn't have so much time to prepare PowerPoint for each class. Moreover, I was thinking of having a project for students to complete during the break and hand in at the beginning of the semester, but the students didn't care about that. I guess the reason was I just stayed at that school for a semester.”

This message from one of the teacher-participants stated that after she tried the interactive activities, she struggled due to her school's culture regarding what is appropriate in the classroom. Yet, despite the pedagogical difference between the teacher-participant and her director, the teacher-participant insisted that her first priority in her classes was to consider her students' interests.

“When I used the interactive activities that I learned from our guest presentations in my classes, my students always made too much noise because they were excited about answering the questions and getting the bonus. Their learning motivations were increased. However, the director of student affair told me that I made too much sounds in class, and which is

inappropriate during the class period. As I think of my students' learning needs and interests, I decided to close the doors and windows as I played a game or an activity with them.”

Concern 3: Teacher-participants have different viewpoints on asynchronous activities.

Although the teacher-participants pointed out that even though the schedule of the TOPDC was flexible, their personal time management was another cause for concern. As one of the teacher-participants noted, a face-to-face professional development activity/ workshop/ conference is held at a specific time and date, and the teachers usually have a day-off to attend the course. This differs from the TOPDC with regard to the asynchronous activities, which a teacher might easily put off because the onus is placed on the individual to schedule and complete the work in time. They stated that they did not have time to read the academic articles as well as to post the feedback within a couple of weeks, so they postponed the work for later. However, they did not have time to catch up with the work.

“I have 24 teaching hours, 4 different grades to teach per week, and need to lead another extracurricular activity every Wednesday. I try my best to read the articles, but I don't have time to post my thoughts online. I need more time to think how to write my thoughts in word. But when I put it away, it's hard for me to catch up.”

“I read the articles very slowly, and on the weekdays I usually don't have time to do it. I read on the weekends, but I can't finish reading or my postings. So sometimes I prefer to read Chinese version instead.”

“I think online professional development course has its own advantage because it is not limited...But I think sometimes we [I] will be disturbed by ourselves [myself]. We [I] sometimes forget the time and date of the workshop or due day for the discussion posting. Moreover, sometimes we [I] are too busy, and will put the online work away. Then it's hard to complete the assignment after a couple of activities.”

By contrast, another teacher-participant suggested that she would like to have more interactions through the online discussion board.

“I guess other teachers are too busy to post feedback on the discussion board, so if next time we can have more interaction on that. It would be great for me. I think I can learn more from others.”

Summary

According to the emerging themes, the teacher-participants articulated that they varied their English lessons with new techniques and activities they had learned from the guest speakers and peers during the TOPDC, as well as increased their students' English learning motivation. What is more, the teacher-participants' concerns provided critical views on not only the form and the design of a professional development activity/course/program, but also the asynchronous activities in the TOPDC.

As I went back and reviewed the themes and concerns, I saw three main features of TOPDC that were given prominence by the teacher-participants when they discussed joining in any professional development activity/course/program.

- The topics and activities of a professional development activity/ course/ program should be required to focus on teachers' interests and needs.
- It is important for teachers have an opportunity to access to native English speakers who are experts in ESL teaching.
- It is valuable for teachers to receive immediate feedback from experts and peers in a professional development activity/ course/ program.

In addition to these three features, I also noticed that there were several other less prominent, yet still noteworthy, elements that were discussed by the teacher-participants as the considered the pros and cons of online vs. face-to face professional development (Table 3).

Table 3. Teacher-Participant's Viewpoints on Designing Professional Development

Required Features		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The topics and activities must focus on teachers' interests and needs • Teachers must have an opportunity to access to native English speakers • Teachers must be able to receive immediate feedback from others 		
Other elements	Face-to-face PD	Online PD
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - time off from school - may impact personal schedule (e.g., weekend) - prescheduled activities - travel time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - may impact personal schedule (e.g., after work, weekend) - flexible schedule with activities
Cost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - registration fees for the conferences/workshops - travel cost 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - registration fees for formal PD organization (e.g., university, company) - free registration with informal (e.g., research study, study group) - no additional fee for Internet
Participant Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - location bound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - no limitation
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "one-shot" activity (no follow-up) - lack of time for discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - online resources immediately available - may have follow-up activities - may use alternative/ online methods for discussion (e.g., discussion board, chat room, CoureSites, Skype, etc.)
Course period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - short-term (e.g., couple hours to couple days) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - short term or long-term (e.g., meet regularly; possibly daily, weekly, monthly)

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FINAL THOUGHTS

“The teacher within the network, online learning community may act as a facilitator, a mentor or a guide, a curator, or a technologist, but most often the teacher may appear as a peer learner, an expert learner, rather than a traditional expert of the field in order to encourage participation and engagement of adult learners.” (Mak, 2010, para. 6).

The idea for this study emerged from my desire to address the true professional development needs and interests of Taiwanese English language teachers, to find a way to allow these teachers and others to meet and be able to discuss ESL teaching issues and innovations, to bridge the geographical gap, and to introduce the benefits of an online learning environment. In order to address all of this I decided to create an online professional development course for Taiwanese ESL teachers.

Not surprisingly, there was a lack of literature on how best to implement professional development in a web-based environment for Taiwanese English language teachers. As a result, I developed the Taiwanese ESL Teachers’ Online Professional Development Community (TOPDC) based on pertinent literature available on professional development, teacher-learning communities, and online professional development. However, it was also important to consider the specific context for this course. That is, taking into consideration the theoretical framework of sociocultural theory, it was important to contextualize the study. To address this, I chose to include an outline of the Taiwanese educational system, how English language education is changing in Taiwan, as well as information on English teacher education and the challenges pertaining to English language learning in Taiwan.

However, in order to understand the impact of the TOPDC, I decided to focus my study on the people I most wanted to help: Taiwanese English language teachers. Thus, this research was best suited to a qualitative case study approach, as this method would allow me to uncover the perspectives of the four Taiwanese English language teacher-participants who engaged in a new form of online professional development.

The overarching research question that guided me was:
What are Taiwanese ESL teachers' perspectives on participating in an online professional development setting?

In order to address this question the following sub-questions were considered:

1. How might an online professional development course address the learning needs and interests of Taiwanese ESL teachers?
2. How might an online professional development course impact Taiwanese ESL teachers' classroom practice?
3. How might information and communications technologies (ICTs) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) be leveraged to facilitate collaborative professional development activities for Taiwanese ESL teachers in an online professional development setting?
4. What might Taiwanese ESL teachers' motivations be to sustain an online professional development course?

The conclusions drawn from the themes and concerns in this study provide points of consideration for Taiwanese English language teachers, teachers in general subjects, online

professional development, and course instructors/ providers in either face-to-face or online environments.

Discussions and Conclusions

Taiwanese English language teachers & teachers in general subjects

Self-inquiry & teacher autonomy

In order to address teachers' needs in the TOPDC, the teacher-participants had to be aware of their teaching/learning needs. To assess this, they employed what Richards and Farrell (2005) called "self-inquiry," which involved the teachers examining their teaching situation and asking questions about their teaching practices (p. 14). For example, Penney, one of the teacher-participants, examined her teaching situation and discovered that not only does she place an emphasis on listening and speaking strategies, but she does so due to the pressure of the exams her students will face. Thus for Penney, her needs and interests were primarily in the area of listening and speaking, although she was also interested in other areas.

The teacher-participants also indicated that they were hoping to have opportunities to improve their English language competencies. They believed that by experiencing a professional development course, which was conducted by native English speaking ESL teachers, they could enhance their English language competencies, develop their professional skills (Bailey et al., 2001), and potentially improve students' learning achievement (Barell, 2003, p. 216). Thus, I was reminded that people do not have many opportunities to apply

their English language in their daily lives. Even English language teachers barely use English to teach their classes (Freundl, 2004).

As the feedback from the pre-questionnaire focused on the teacher-participants' needs and interests, the activities and topics for the TOPDC were determined according to their responses. Thus, the activities conducted during the TOPDC provided the teacher-participants with opportunities to learn different instructional techniques and strategies that were specific to the needs and interests that they had articulated. To put it succinctly, the teacher-participants were able to clearly articulate their learning needs and interests and thus these were given priority in the design and delivery of TOPDC.

Based on this study along with the work of Desimone (2009) and Hill (2009), we can say that it is critical for teachers to have an opportunity to decide and choose learning content in a professional development activity/ course. That is, teachers will engage more fully in the activities that they themselves choose, improving and deepening their professional knowledge in their own field (Desimone, 2009). It is important to note that with regard to teacher autonomy, it is quite significant for Taiwanese English language teachers to have input to their own professional activities, to focus on their needs and interests, and to engage in the development of self-determination. This has become especially important given the reformation of the Taiwanese educational system, as teachers are expected to have the capability to develop various teaching materials and activities consistent with school-based curriculum (Chen & Tsai, 2012; MOE, 2012).

Teacher's motivation

In this study, the teacher-participants expressed their hope to learn different and new teaching techniques and strategies in the professional development courses and workshops. They aimed to integrate their new professional knowledge into their English lessons, as well as sought to increase their students' interest in learning, motivation, and confidence. They were eager to learn up-to-date teaching skills, had opportunities for professional sharing and collaboration, improved professional growth, and interacted with other English language teaching experts. This is consistent with the work with Marrero, Woodruff and Schuster (2010) who saw the importance of teachers motivation with regard to engagement in professional development activities. That is to say, one must be motivated to improve one's professional skills, increase one's content knowledge (i.e., the English language teaching), stay committed to the profession, and hold onto one's passion for teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

Teacher's change

Kelchtermans (2004) defines continuing professional development as “a learning process resulting from meaningful interaction with the context (both in time and space) and eventually leading to changes in teachers' professional practice (actions) and in their thinking about that practice” (p. 220). With regard to Kelchtermans' statement of professional development, the teacher-participants also conveyed that their teaching beliefs, attitudes, and styles had been changed during the TOPDC. They were aware of the importance of an interactive teaching environment and practiced various interactive teaching strategies and

techniques in their classes. Subsequently, they also noticed that they might need to modify the techniques and activities they were learning before using them in their classes.

Nonetheless, they expressed an interest in learning more hands-on activities that they would be able to use in their classrooms right away (Marrero et al., 2010; Richter et al., 2011).

Some of the teachers faced difficulties when it came to the new material in a real classroom situation. These included: conflicts with the school culture, a lack of time to either lead class activities or prepare new teaching materials, a failure to learn techniques that they could introduce in the classroom immediately, and even the lack of a stable or official full-time teaching position that could allow for the opportunity to develop projects suitable for a more long-term learning process. Yet despite this, all the teacher-participants were willing to incorporate the new activities and techniques they had learned from the TOPDC into their lesson plans.

Interestingly, the teacher-participants noted that when they were able to integrate the new techniques and activities into their courses, their students provided positive feedback to them about the changes. This suggests that students might respond to a greater variety of teaching techniques to increase their learning motivation. However, it is important to note that although teacher-participants' students gave them positive feedback as they implemented new teaching techniques and activities, there is no evidence to say whether the students simply liked the new ways the teacher-participants used or if they had learned better from the techniques.

Yet, the teacher-participants felt that implementing different methods was indeed helpful to their students and believed that the new ways of teaching supported the students in meeting their learning goals (Liao, 2007; Shinde & Karekatti, 2012; Stephens et al., 1993). As a result, the teacher-participants seemed to have made both short term and long term changes in their teaching styles. This is clearly revealed by the participants, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: The Changes in the Teaching Styles

	Teaching styles before the TOPDC	Teaching styles changed after the TOPDC	Teaching styles after the TOPDC in 6-month
Caron	- lecture - games	- interactive activities: group work - calling on students	- lecture - interactive activities: group work, discussion and sharing
Lara	- handouts - using multimedia tools - guest presentations - group discussions	- grammar instruction - a blog or online discussion board - virtual meeting (expected)	- grammar instruction -using multimedia tools - blog postings (group work)
Fay	- lecture - handouts - small talk	- interactive activities: group work, discussion and sharing - guest presentations	- interactive activities: discussion and sharing - lecture - handouts
Penney	- lecture - handouts	- less lecture - interactive activities: group work, discussion and sharing - multimedia tools: YouTube, VoiceThread	- lecture - interactive activities: discussion and sharing - multimedia tools: VoiceThread (group work)

Thus, based on the participants in the study, an online professional development course (OPDC) can positively influence teaching practices, professional knowledge, and skills (Marrero et al., 2010).

Online professional development

With regard to the emerging themes from this study and Marrero, Woodruff and Schuster's (2010) findings, having flexibility with regard to course structure as well as interaction with other educators are important features of an online course for participants. As a result, an online design should capitalize on the flexibility that traditional professional development trainings do not, as well as provide opportunities for participants to connect with others and engage in collaborative learning without the limitation of time, space, and cost.

Professional development instructors/ providers/ educators

As per the literature review, Taiwan professional development trainings are usually based on a top-down model (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Leahy & William, 2009; Tseng, 2003), in which teachers rarely have a chance to decide on topics or focus on their own needs and interests. However, with regard to teacher autonomy and motivation, it becomes crucial for successful professional development to be created with a "bottom-up" design (Chen & Tsai, 2012; Hill, 2009). As a result, a professional development instructor/provider could view the design of the TOPDC as a model to construct a new course for teachers.

Fay, one of the teacher-participants, also noted that professional development might be more effective and efficient if school administrators supported teachers' learning. As Dove (2010) claimed, administrative support has been found to be essential to the success of sustained teachers' professional growth and collaborative efforts. In other words, schools

need to develop professional development plans with clear teaching goals and learning achievements, which can in turn benefit students as well (Avalos, 2011; Chen, 2001; Tseng, 2003; Zhan, 2000).

Culture - Confucianism

The culture of Taiwan is influenced by Confucianism philosophy, and it has naturally included teaching and learning. For example, learners in a Confucian context, such as Taiwan, expected to receive immediate responses from an instructor. As a result, in this study the four teacher-participants acted as typical Taiwanese learners who appreciated the immediate feedback, suggestions, and discussions with the guest speakers and peers in the synchronous activities. As one of the teacher-participants commented, she was able to learn better when she saw and interacted with the guest speakers. In other words, a positive model with immediacy behaviors is a crucial element for Taiwanese teachers. In addition, collaborative work is also a part of Confucian beliefs (Hwang, 2001; Kim, 2007). Thus, a successful model from a Confucian perspective would include key aspects such as were found in the study when the teacher-participants supported one another in English language teaching, shared knowledge with one another, as well as built a trusting learning community.

However, under the values of Confucianism, many people in Asian societies have been educated not only to respect but also to obey rules made by the elderly without questioning. Not surprisingly, most Taiwanese will have followed this traditional convention since they were children. As a result, many Taiwanese adolescents, adults, even teachers, rarely have opportunities either to express personal opinions in public or to decide personal

choices in an event. Yet, in this study, the teacher-participants were asked to voice their needs and interests while planning the activity for each module. In this sense, the Confucian perspective is still respected as the teacher-participants seek to develop their ability to be the best teachers they can be.

Online Professional Development Model

According to the analysis of the findings, a successful model for online professional development might incorporate the following aspects: (a) teacher choices, (b) facilitator support, guidance and organization, (c) outside resources, and (d) short assignments. The goal of such a model is to offer teachers/ participants room not only to focus on their interests and needs, but also to allow them to decide on the content for professional development activities. Thus, every member in the course is given opportunity to share and discuss various subject matters related to their teaching field. This applies not only to the teachers/ participants, but also to the professional development facilitator and guest speakers who are also able to share their knowledge with one another resulting in a course that is also a learning community. However, there are potential problems in terms of time issues and responsibility for full participation. That is, although the teacher/ participants may not meet every week, there will still be those who may not have enough time to complete each assignment because of heavy teaching loads. Therefore, it is a crucial task for the facilitator to be aware of the need to sustain the teachers'/ participants' learning motivation.

The following outline for an online professional development for teachers is structured as a course, based on the design of the course that was developed during this

research. There are key elements that were quite important to the development of content and community, such as the warm-up activities. However the specifics of the content and activities would expand based on the specific participants involved in the professional development. The arrangement of the models themselves with guest presentations, reading, discussions, and so forth are organized to suggest a process that will support participants' motivation for engagement and participation.

Table 5: A Model for Online Professional Development for Teachers

Warm-up Activities for Participants		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection: Participants can reflect on their career which may increase their self-awareness and help them organize and synthesize their thoughts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write several items or a few sentences to describe satisfying events - Write several items or a few sentences to describe dissatisfying events - Review teaching/learning goals for the academic year - Think about the gap between what your career is like now and how you would like it to be - Think of an area you would like to improve • Questionnaire: Participants answer the questions related to personal educational backgrounds, teaching beliefs, previous professional development experiences, most pressing needs and interests in terms of the professional development course, as well as availability (days/ times) for participation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Section I: Personal educational background - Section II: Teaching beliefs - Section III: Previous professional development experiences - Section IV: Teaching needs and interests - Section V: The most available day and time for synchronous activity 		
Module	Learning Approach	Activities for participants
Module 1	Synchronous (Approximately 90 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Expectation for self, the class, and other participants • Long-term learning goals discussion
Assignment:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An article/ reading on a topic related to participants' needs and interests 		
Module 2	Synchronous (Approximately 60 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest presentation
Assignment:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practice one of the teaching techniques in their home classes 		

(Table 5 continues)

(Table 5 continued)

Module	Learning Approach	Activities for participants
Module 3	Synchronous (Approximately 45-60 minutes) Asynchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debriefing of teaching techniques • Article discussion • Either post a question related to the classroom practice or a reflection on the article discussion
Assignment:		
- Sign up for a topic for the article discussions (Since module 5, participants will search an article for reading, and lead the article discussion)		
Module 4	Synchronous (Approximately 60 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest presentation
Assignment:		
- Practice one of the teaching techniques in their home classes		
- Participants who take charge of Module 5 need to send out the article by Friday		
Module 5	Synchronous (Approximately 45-60 minutes) Asynchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debriefing of teaching techniques • Article discussion (lead by the participants) • Either post a question related to the classroom practice or a reflection on the article discussion
Assignment:		
- Participants who take charge of Module 7 need to send out the article by Friday		
Module 6	Synchronous (Approximately 60 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest presentation
Assignment:		
- Practice one of the teaching techniques in their home classes		
- Read the article for Module 7		
Module 7	Synchronous (Approximately 45-60 minutes) Asynchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debriefing of teaching techniques • Article discussion (lead by the participants) • Either post a question related to the classroom practice or a reflection on the article discussion
Assignment:		
- Participants who take charge of Module 9 need to send out the article by Friday		
Module 8	Synchronous (Approximately 60 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest presentation
Assignment:		
- Practice one of the teaching techniques in their home classes		
- Read the article for Module 9		

(Table 5 continues)

(Table 5 continued)

Module	Learning Approach	Activities for participants
Module 9	Synchronous (Approximately 45-60 minutes) Asynchronous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debriefing of teaching techniques • Article discussion (lead by the participants) • Either post a question related to the classroom practice or a reflection on the article discussion
Assignment:		
- Write a few sentences to reflect on the overall activities		
Module 10	Synchronous (Approximately 60 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation and discussion of the professional development activities ➔ Did the professional development achieve the intended outcomes and participants' expectations?

It is important to include time frames and to discuss this with participants so that asynchronous activities and readings can be well managed. Given that this is a model for English language educators who are not native speakers of English, it is important to ensure that readings are well chosen, and that time to read and process materials is considered. In addition, other supports such as pre-organizers or during/ post-reading organizers might be thoughtfully planned. As such, this model would serve well for language educators in other cultures as well as other languages where participants are non-native speakers.

Contribution to Various Fields

The results of this research make several contributions to fields of study related to online professional development, including ESL teachers' online professional development, Taiwanese English language teachers' online professional development, and Taiwanese teachers' professional development in general.

ESL teachers' online professional development

Online professional development can be easily facilitated by employing social networks to gain additional ways to further teachers' professional development and to expand the pool of ESL professionals who can serve as mentors, instructors, or guest speakers for activities in an online professional development activity/course (Dela Cruz-Yeh, 2011; Kanokpermpoon, 2013; Pallof & Pratt, 2007; Rheingold, 2000). What is more, the design of this study presents a framework for an online professional development instructor/provider to recruit English language teachers from different countries around the world and/or from different regions of a country (Manner & Rodriguez, 2012). Thus, English language teachers will have an opportunity to interact and collaborate with other English language teachers from different countries.

Taiwanese teachers' online professional development

This study provides new insights for Taiwanese teachers in either urban or rural areas to have more opportunities to improve their professional knowledge via the Internet. For example, the structure and features of the TOPDC show that access to online professional development can be made affordable, simply by enabling teachers to collaborate and participate in online activities that are carefully planned and implemented (Richter et al., 2011). What is more, using online technological tools is a practical approach to overcoming the shortage of teaching resources in rural areas (Manner & Rodriguez, 2012); that is, teachers and students in rural areas may have opportunities to access various teaching resources and materials through a web-based learning environment.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the well-prepared and soundly structured TOPDC and the exploratory nature of this study, some limitations need to be addressed.

First, because of the small number of participants, the results of the study are not necessary representative of Taiwanese English language teachers' views in general about participating in online professional development. Moreover, the participants in this study all came from the same region of Taiwan and this may have had an influence on the resulting themes and concerns. Nonetheless, the themes and concerns from the data in the study can still be considered as having provided initial insights into Taiwanese ESL teachers' perspectives with regard to involvement, engagement, and participation in an online professional development course.

Second, while there are some research studies focused on online professional development for Taiwanese teachers (Dela Cruz-Yeh, 2011; Kao & Tsai, 2009; Liaw, 2009; Liou, 2001; Shih & Lou, 2011; Yang & Liu, 2004), there are none that specifically place an emphasis on Taiwanese in-service English language teachers' professional development. Rather, the design of this research study is closer to the work of Marrero, Woodruff and Schuster (2010) who conducted a series of live, online, interactive short courses for science teachers. Even though the methodology and participants were different, these two studies aimed to (a) provide teachers' practical teaching techniques, (b) deliver an opportunity for professional sharing and collaboration, (c) increase teachers' professional growth, (d) focus on teacher' needs and interests, and (e) receive immediate feedback from peers. Thus, this

work builds a somewhat new direction for online professional development for Taiwanese teachers instead of extending existing research.

Finally, time management and/or work schedules are also crucial factors in terms of successful teachers' professional development. Many Taiwanese teachers work long hours, usually starting in the early morning and extending until late at night. They may not have enough time to read the materials, post reflections, and respond to others in a timely manner. This was evident in the TOPDC and as a result they engaged in little interaction within asynchronous activities.

Recommendations

Based on prior discussions, some recommendations can be provided for future research, online professional development instructors/providers, and ESL teachers' online professional development endeavors that involve designing, planning, and conducting online professional development activities/courses/programs.

Future research

1. Recruiting Taiwanese ESL teachers from different regions and of various educational levels could provide either important information with regard to survey findings or more in-depth descriptions of teachers' experiences. With regard to recruiting a large number of participants in an OPDC, it could be possible to include statistical analyses to test the correlation between participants' backgrounds, past experiences, and teaching styles as well as the impact an OPDC might have on participants.

2. The design of the TOPDC, with regard to gathering the initial participants, involved created an online learning community that was extended from the face-to-face professional development course. Thus, it is impossible to compare the similarities and differences between an online learning community and a face-to-face learning community. However, this could be a valuable topic for future research.
3. Various social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Skype are already well developed and available in mobile-web applications format. Thus, an online professional development instructor/ provider could be encouraged to use other online social networks or mobile technologies to manage the online course. Both teachers and professional development instructors/providers should consider what these new technologies can offer and how teacher development can be delivered in an appropriate way. Future research is needed on the application and relative effectiveness of new web tools in an OPDC.

Online professional development instructors/ providers

1. With regard to time management issues, an OPDC instructor/provider might propose to record a lecture and make it available for download; in this way, teachers can take advantage of these materials and listen to them as needed. This would allow teachers to review the materials afterward as well. However, the OPDC instructor/provider should consider the impact of this format on the success of any synchronous peer-to-peer interaction in the course.

2. In addition to asynchronous and synchronous activities, participants can be encouraged to video record their classes and write self-evaluations as they try new teaching techniques and/or activities. Subsequently, they may share their recording with peer to receive feedback in order to develop the quality of their instruction, and to advance the likelihood of improving their students' learning.
3. Technical training and coaching will be required before an online course is started to ensure that both the participants and the speakers are able to collaborate in both synchronous and asynchronous activities. When appropriate training is provided, both teachers and speakers are more likely to trouble-shoot and work to fix the technical glitches that can happen within an online professional development community.

ESL teachers' online professional development

1. To plan effective professional development activities for teachers, an instructor/provider has to be aware of cultural distinctions. In particular, there is a dramatic difference between Eastern and Western teaching methods, such as teacher-centered vs. student-centered. Even though some Asian countries (e.g., Taiwan) are reforming their educational system, there are still some differences within certain cultural aspects of English language teaching and learning. As a result, it is important for a professional development instructor/provider to consider how to encompass professionalism and the intercultural aspects of English language teaching for a group of teachers from different countries around the globe.

2. Considering that the English language is not an official language in Taiwan, it may not only be difficult but also time-consuming for Taiwanese English language teachers to read English academic articles and/or journal articles in a short time and immediately post a response. This does not mean that English language teachers do not have the ability to read or write in English; however, some of them may need to spend considerable time reading and understanding the content before they can discuss and/or post responses. As a result, it is important to provide participants whose native language is not English with enough time to read English academic articles.

Final Thoughts

One of the aims of a professional development program is to increase a teacher's ability to apply new teaching techniques and strategies, and to adjust lesson plans to reflect the reality of actual teaching contexts. In this study, I uncovered the Taiwanese ESL teachers' perspectives on engaging in the TOPDC, in which they used online technologies not only in interacting, communicating, and collaborating with other teachers at a distance but also in sharing and creating knowledge in the online environment.

With future research of this nature, I will aim to apply what I have learned in this study, and develop an online professional development course for English language teachers from different countries. A future goal would be to understand how a community built within an online setting differs from one that is initially developed in a face-to-face professional development course (e.g., the TOPDC). I would also like to compare and contrast an online

professional development course with a blend of asynchronous and synchronous activities and another one with using synchronous activities only. In addition, I would like to help professional development providers develop a deeper awareness of what types of technological tools are able to increase English language teachers' discussion, collaboration, and interaction. By conducting this study, I have begun to understand what are important elements to develop an effective professional development course for teachers. As I continue to explore English language teachers' online professional development, I hope to contribute to the research on creating professional development.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

August 29, 2012

University of Idaho

Office of Research Assurances

Institutional Review Board

PO Box 443010

Moscow ID 83844-3010

Phone: 208-885-6162

Fax: 208-885-5752

irb@uidaho.edu

To: Duvall, Emily
Cc: Chu, Shiao-wei

From: Traci Craig, PhD
Chair, University of Idaho Institutional Review Board
University Research Office
Moscow, ID 83844-3010

Title: 'A New Paradigm in ESL Teaching and Learning Environments:
Online Professional Development for Taiwanese ESL Instructors '

Project: 12-256
Approved: 08/24/12
Expires: 08/23/13

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the protocol for the above-named research project is approved as offering no significant risk to human subjects.

This approval is valid for one year from the date of this memo. Should there be significant changes in the protocol for this project, it will be necessary for you to resubmit the protocol for review by the Committee.



Traci Craig

Appendix B: Consent Form

The University of Idaho Institutional Review Board has approved this project
Please read the following statements carefully before signing this consent form.

The purpose of this study is to understand Taiwanese ESL teachers' perspectives with regard to their participation in an online professional development course.

Although there are a variety of online professional development (PD) activities for teachers all over the world, there are very few online PD activities focused on Taiwanese ESL teachers. To experience an interactive PD course in an online environment, you are being asked to participate in a 14-week, online PD course for Taiwanese ESL teachers. This online PD course is intended to support Taiwanese English teachers' instructional, educational, and cultural needs, with a focus on the four foundational language skills: reading, speaking, writing and listening.

There will be seven modules in the 14-week online PD course. And they will be structured in two ways. In first approach will be an asynchronous and involve a monthly required activity that includes reading, reflecting, and responding to some aspect of effective English teaching instructions. In this approach, you will also be asked to co-facilitate a two-week activity with one to three partners, which will include providing both a reading and writing prompt.

The second approach is synchronous will include an activity that takes place via Skype or Elluminate *Live!* once a month. This activity will involve native speakers from the United States who will engage with the participants from Taiwan.

The researcher, Ms. Chu, will act primary as a mentor and facilitator to guide you, support you and encourage you to participate and engage in the activities.

During this 14-week online PD course you will be asked to:

1. Pre- and post course activities:

- a. Complete pre- and post-questionnaires (approximately 20-30 minutes each)
- b. Participate in a one-to-one recorded telephone interview (post-course) (approximately 30-40 minutes)

2. Course activities:

- a. Participation time is at your description for asynchronous activities:
You will engage in online discussions; read and respond to prompts/ postings; read and respond to feedback (Each session will estimate approximately to take one hour).
- b. Participation time is pre-arranged for synchronous activities:
You will listen to a live guest presentation and participate in a discussion (Each session will be approximately 90 minutes)

The data to be included in this research will be the pre-and post-questionnaires, written records of the online activities, note-taking by Ms. Chu during the guest presentation activities, and the audio-recordings of the one-to-one interviews.

All the data collected for this study will be kept confidential. No one but Ms. Chu will know your identity. Your identity will be kept confidential by using a code and a pseudonym. Your names will not be used. The results of this study may be published; however, your identity will not be revealed. All information will be kept on a secure computer, with access available only to Ms. Chu and her advisor, Dr. Emily Duvall.

Any questions you have concerning this study may be referred to Ms. Chu or her advisor, at any time. Your decision to participate in this research is your choice, and you may withdraw from this study at any time. Your completion of this online PD course will allow you get 30 hours of professional development credits from the National Sun Yet-san University. Please note you may withdraw from the research study, but still continue to participate in this online PD course and earn the credits.

FOR PARTICIPANT: (Please check the appropriate box below.)

I AGREE to allow the following documents/recordings to be used for the research purpose described above.

audio-recording interview

pre-questionnaire

post-questionnaire

online discussions

I DO NOT give my permission for an audio-recorded of my interview with the researcher, but **I DO** give my permission to participate in every other way.

Participant Name (Please Print):

Participant Signature: Date:

Investigator: Shiao-wei Chu, Graduate Student

University of Idaho

Dept. of Graduate Studies

Moscow, ID 83844

Phone: 208-596-6710 | wei7728@vandals.uidaho.edu

Faculty sponsor: Emily Duvall, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction

University of Idaho, Coeur d'Alene

1031 North Academic Way, Suite 242

Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

Phone: 208-292-2512 | emily@uidaho.edu

Appendix C: Research Introductory Letter

Dear friends,

How's your new semester? I hope all of you have a great start. :D

I've officially received the approval letter from the IRB community at University of Idaho. Thank you, everyone, for your willingness to be involved in this study and for contributing to important research in the area of EFL/ESL teacher professional development. I am looking forward to each of your responses!

So, the good news is that we are ready to get started! I'm going to keep this email short and point-by-point so that it is easy to read and follow. I know your time is precious.

1. I will be emailing you from my Vandal account (wei7728@vandals.uidaho.edu) for all research-related items. If you need any help or have any questions and concerns, please reply to my Vandal account so that I can stay organized.
2. This is our warm-up activity: to complete the **Questionnaire** (see the attachment). This questionnaire is really important before we start our modules. There is no wrong answer for each question. Please be honest and let me know your interests and needs. If possible, **PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE** send me back your responses of the questionnaire before **Wednesday, September 12, 2012**. I will collect all of the data and make the plans for following modules.
3. I would like to start our first module on **Friday, September 14, 2012**, and I will post the reading and writing prompt on **Wednesday, September 12, 2012**. The discussion and responses of this module will open until **Thursday, September 27, 2012**. You will have two weeks to read the materials, share your opinions and thoughts by writing, and respond to your friends. Please respond to at least **3 friends**.
4. I will send you an invited mail from CoureSites by Blackboard, in which is we build up our home for this online community. This is a closed group, so only you, our "family" members, and my advisor, Dr. Emily Duvall, and April's advisor, Dr. Doug Hartman, will have access to it. Your privacy is protected. It is located at www.coursesites.com.
6. I also attach our schedule for this online professional development community. Please see the attachment. If you have any questions or concerns, please let me know, and I will try my best to help you.

7. I would like to hear your voice about "live" guest presentation. We are going to have "live" guest presentations on the week of Friday, October 12, 2012-Thursday, October 18, 2012 (guest presentation 1); Friday, November 9, 2012-Thursday, November 15, 2012 (guest presentation 2), and Friday, December 7, 2012-Thursday, December 13, 2012 (guest presentation 3).

Could you please let me know which "**day**" will be the best for you to join this "live" party? PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE let me know your answer by **Wednesday, September 12, 2012**. I will deeply appreciate your help.

Thank you SUPER SUPER SUPER much, my dear friends.

I look forward to hearing from each of you- and I am excited to begin our exploration of English teaching techniques and strategies and discussing, sharing & writing support in these coming months.

Have a wonderful day!

Shiao-wei

Ph.D. Candidate
Curriculum & Instruction
College of Education
University of Idaho
Email: wei7728@vandals.uidaho.edu
Skype: milu_jasmine

Section II: English Teaching Beliefs

Directions: Place an “X” in the box under the response, (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Disagree nor Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree), that best describes your opinion about each statement.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A. Nature of Children’s English Development					
1. Every child can learn English well.					
2. It is best for children to learn English from as early as the first grade.					
3. It is important to teach primary school children English listening and speaking skills.					
4. Every student learns English with different learning styles in the classroom.					
5. Students acquire English easily when they are doing activities.					
6. How students use their mother tongue would affect their capabilities to learn English.					
7. Students can learn English better if they fully understand the content of the lesson.					
8. Students can’t learn English without regular practice.					
9. Students learn English through interactions with other people.					

10. English medium students are faster in learning English than Chinese medium students.					
--	--	--	--	--	--

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
B. Beliefs about Teacher Talk					
1. In English classroom teacher should talk all the time and students should only listen.					
2. English teachers can give an excellent English input to students only through their talk/speech.					
3. Chinese must be used if students do not understand English.					
4. As they are children and English is a totally new language to them, teacher should always make use of repetition and paraphrasing.					
5. Teachers should get appropriate training about how to talk effectively while teaching English to EFL/ESL students.					
C. Teaching Methods & Techniques					
1. Teaching English through English is more effective than bilingual method of using both Chinese and English					
2. Students learn English better if they are given opportunities to move around in the English classroom.					

3. English pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar should be taught in an integrative manner, rather than separately.					
Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4. Chinese should be used while teaching English to students.					
5. The most important element in teaching English is vocabulary.					
6. It is important to use multimedia equipment (e.g. audio and video, tapes, Internet, multimedia) in teaching English.					
7. Students should not be punished for making mistakes while learning English.					
8. Students should be given more chances to speak and act.					
9. Chinese should never be used while teaching English to students					
10. Teacher should always correct the mistakes of the students.					
11. To include games into English instruction can facilitate students' learning.					
D. Self-efficacy as an English Teacher					
1. I am confident of becoming a good English teacher.					
2. Teaching English in the school is easy to me.					
3. I believe that I am capable of teaching					

English to EFL/ESL students.					
4. To teach English in the school is a meaningful job.					

Section III: Interests and Needs

1. What would you like to learn more about in this professional development course?

(Please select the **THREE** most important items for your interests and needs)

- Reading Writing Listening Speaking Grammar
- Pronunciation Editing Conferencing with students Translation
- Others, please explain

Please use the space below to explain your interests and needs in this professional development course:

.....

.....

.....

.....

Section IV: Previous Professional Development Experiences

1. What model of professional development activities have you attended?

- face-to-face professional development activities (Please go to Question 2)
 web-based professional development activities (Please go to Question 3)

2. What kinds of face-to-face professional development activities have you attended?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> English courses from university | <input type="checkbox"/> Workshops from book publisher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lectures from educational experts | <input type="checkbox"/> Education conference |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speech from outside experts | <input type="checkbox"/> Observation visits to other schools/classes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Individual and collaborative research | <input type="checkbox"/> Study group/ community |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring and peer observation | <input type="checkbox"/> Others: |

3. What kinds of web-based professional development activities have you attended?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Blogs posting | <input type="checkbox"/> Synchronous discussion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distance learning course | <input type="checkbox"/> Asynchronous discussion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Virtual classroom | <input type="checkbox"/> Blended course |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) | <input type="checkbox"/> Wikis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yahoo! Group | <input type="checkbox"/> Electronic Village by TESOL |

Others:

Section V: Attitudes on Distance Learning

Directions: Place an “X” in the box under the response, (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Disagree nor Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree), that best describes your opinion about each statement.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. Most people believe that Distance Learning (DL) is more effective than traditional methodologies.					
2. In a course with both traditional and DL methodologies, I learn better through the DL portion.					
3. I prefer DL courses to traditional courses.					
4. I believe that I can learn the same amount in a DL course as in a traditional course.					
5. I believe that I can make the same grade in a DL course as in a traditional course.					
6. I would benefit if there were more DL courses.					
7. DL does not offer any advantages to me.					
8. DL requires significant changes by a student.					
9. I believe that I can learn more or would learn more through on-line material than through lectures.					
10. DL saves me time.					
11. DL works well with my schedule.					
12. DL enables me to attend classes more frequently than traditional courses.					
13. It is difficult to contribute to class discussions in a DL course.					

Section VI: Attitudes on Online Professional Development

Directions: Place an “X” in the box under the response, (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree), that best describes your opinion about each statement.

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A. Perceived usefulness					
1. Online professional development helps my instruction become more interesting.					
2. Online professional development helps to increase my creativity for instruction.					
3. Online professional development facilitates my teaching.					
4. Online professional development effectively enhances my learning.					
5. Online professional development improves my professional knowledge.					
B. Perceived ease of use					
1. It is easy for me to attend an online professional development course on the Internet.					
2. It is convenient to receive training on the job by using online professional development.					
3. It is easy to get online professional development to do what I want about it.					
4. The content of online professional development course is clear, and easy to be accessed for learning.					

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. The learning of online professional development course is flexible.					
C. Perceived difficulty					
1. Too many web resources make me feel unfocused.					
2. I can't have a question right away when meeting problems, and may get the wrong answer from the online discussion.					
3. Too many online learning make my writing and verbal ability getting worst.					
D. Affect					
1. I think it is interesting to participate in an online professional development course.					
2. Online professional development course provides an interesting and attractive environment.					
3. Participating in an online professional development course can improve my teaching ability.					
E. Anxiety					
1. Participating an online professional development course makes me feel anxiety.					
2. Participating an online professional development course makes me feel uncomfortable.					
3. Participating in an online professional development course is boring.					

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
F. Behavior					
1. I hope to spend more time using online professional development course.					
2. I hope to use online professional development more often.					
3. I want to increase my use of online professional development in the future.					
4. I am glad to use online professional development in the future.					
5. I will recommend the use of online professional development to others.					

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this questionnaire 😊