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Reflective Teaching through Small Group Teacher Meeting in a College English Program*

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In spite of much improvement in college English programs, many universities still face a myriad of problems among which a major one is their heavy dependence on part-time instructors. Most part-time instructors have neither a principled understanding of 'how to teach' various English courses nor opportunities for teacher development. Therefore, it must be difficult for them to provide quality instruction to learners. In such a reality, part-time instructors have a dire need for teacher development. This case study examined the influences of small group teacher meeting—an alternative for teacher development—on the instructional practice of part-time instructors who taught college English courses at a private university in Daegu. The data, collected in the fall semester of 2004, show that despite of initial resistance of teachers to participate in small group teacher meeting, they learned to reflect upon their teaching and explore latest instructional methods and strategies through collaborative inquiry. This indicates that small group teacher meeting can be an effective and practical medium for college English programs that strive to improve instructional quality of part-time instructors.

I. INTRODUCTION

Now many universities make efforts to improve college English programs by revamping the program, offering more courses, and reducing class size. Amidst of these efforts, little attention has been paid to enhancing instructional quality of teachers. No matter how excellent the external condition (e.g., classroom equipped with modern technology and, smaller class size) is, it would be difficult for students to receive quality education without a capable teacher.

In Korea, one of the inherent problems in college English programs is that many

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universities heavily depend on part-time instructors (Seikyung Cho, Sung-Chul Moon & Kang-Hyuk Lee, 1997; JeongSoon Joh, 2002; Lee, 2004; Hungsoo Lee & Hyomyung Park, 1996). A newspaper survey reports that universities' dependence on part-time instructors is about 36% as of 2004 (Na, 2005). Part-time instructors in college English program usually have doctoral degrees in English language and literature; however, few of them are trained in how to teach various English courses. Furthermore, part-time instructors generally receive little instructional guidance from the program, which constrains them from providing quality instruction to learners. This implies how urgent it is to provide college instructors with professional development opportunities (Sung, Sung & Jung, 2004). Unfortunately, unlike teachers in elementary and secondary schools, those at colleges and universities rarely have in-service professional development opportunities. In the absence of in-service teacher development program for college (part-time) instructors, small group teacher meeting is believed to be an effective and practical alternative in promoting quality instruction of part-time instructors. The meeting, as such, can help instructors reflect upon their teaching through instructional discussion with their colleagues and improve upon it by exploring better methods and techniques in a collegial atmosphere.

The purpose of this paper is to describe a case of reflective teaching of instructors through small group teacher meeting, who worked for a college English program at a private university in Daegu.

II. COLLEGE ENGLISH PROGRAM IN KOREA

For many universities, college English is a "mega course" offered to thousands of the students (Choong Bae Kim, 1988). Given such a large scope, it is not easy to change the system without much administrative and financial support from the university. Therefore, although some universities have achieved considerable improvement (e.g., have an independent organization to run the program and hire professional teaching staff), many universities still run the program haphazardly and depend a great deal on part-time instructors (Lee, 2004; Jun-Eon Park, 1997).

Inherent problems associated with having part-time instructors teach include: 1) most of the instructors are not trained in how to teach the courses; and 2) there is generally a lack of consistency in the course given that it is usually taught by dozens of different teachers (Seikyung Cho, Sung-Chul Moon & Kang-Hyuk Lee, 1997; JeongSoon Joh, 2002; Lee, 2004; Hungsoo Lee & Hyomyung Park, 1996). In order to address these problems, some researchers have recommended: to provide detailed guidelines and objectives to instructors; to have workshop so that instructors can have informed understanding of course objectives, teaching methods, and strategies; and to have regular small group

teacher meeting in order that instructors can discuss and deal with contingent issues (Dong-Su Chong & Hae-Dong Kim, 2001; JeongSoo Joh, 2002; Yung Suk Jung & Yong Sung Chueh, 2002; Eun-Jeong Kim, 2005; Mi-Jeong Song & Yong-Yae Park, 2004). These suggestions can contribute to improving instructional quality of part-time instructors in a number of perspectives; first, they can be implemented without any financial burden or systemic change in school; and second, these initiatives can bring about more meaningful and immediate change in enhancing instructional quality of part-time instructors because they, the classroom teachers, can be the change agent. In spite of these advantages, unfortunately there have been few documented illustrations of how these recommendations were put into practice in college English programs. Such reality has become a motivation to conduct this case study on the effect of small group teacher meeting on teachers' instructional practice at a college English program.

III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Reflective Teaching

Reflection is a critical element in teachers' professional development (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001). Reflection is defined in various ways, but generally means that teachers reflect on their practice and think consciously of how to improve upon it. Reflection can be approached in several perspectives. First, reflection can take place in an individual and collaborative plane. Teachers generally reflect on their teaching by themselves. However, when they engage in collaborative inquiry, they can share common issues and concerns and devise better and more effective ways to deal with them. Hence collaborative reflection offers a more powerful context for professional development (Kwakman, 2003; Nicholson & Bond, 2003). Second, in terms of time frame, there are two types of reflection – *reflection on action* and *reflection in action* (Schön, D., 1983). The first refers to reflecting after teaching. The second means reflecting while teaching. While experienced teachers can practice both types of reflection with their hands-on-experience, novice teachers generally have difficulty practicing reflection-in-action.

In practicing reflective teaching, Hatton and Smith (1995) point out several problems. First, reflection is not generally associated with working as a teacher because reflection is perceived as a more academic pursuit. Second, for effective reflection, teachers should have time and opportunity for development. Third, teachers might experience feelings of vulnerability by exposing their perceptions and beliefs to others. Fourth, in order to encourage the development of reflection, the structure and ideology of the program should support such reflection. In a Korean educational setting where collaborative reflection is

not a common practice, the above problems pose challenges to classroom teachers who seek to practice reflective teaching.

2. Collaborative Reflection through Teacher Development Group

There are a number of strategies for collaborative reflection such as mentoring, coaching, dialogue journal, action research, and teacher development group (Bailey et al., 2001; Diaz-Maggioli, 2003; Farrell, 1999). Among these strategies, although they originate from the same principle 'collaborative reflection,' teacher development group seems to be a most feasible alternative for a college English program that employs a number of (part-time) instructors; it is practitioner-oriented and has few administrative and financial constraints placed to the university. In this model, teachers form a group, get together regularly, and discuss instructional issues to improve upon their practice.

Amidst of the paucity of studies on collaborative reflection through teacher development group, Farrell (1999) examined the influences of one teacher development group in a Korean EFL setting. The three participating teachers experienced that they became more reflective practitioners by attending the meeting, sharing expertise and engaging in a professional dialogue. However, the fact that these teachers came from different institutes implies that they might have to deal with some issues that were of little relevance to their colleagues. Recently, Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger and Beckingham (2004) conducted a two-year project on collaborative reflection in which primary school teachers in Canada collaborated with the researchers in a set of activities such as workshops, classroom visits, within-school and cross-school meetings. Through these collaborative activities, the teachers learned to reflect on practice, constructed new knowledge about teaching, and made positive instructional shifts (e.g., share ideas with colleagues and problem solve challenges). Such success, the researchers noted, came from ongoing opportunities to co-construct knowledge and revise conceptual frameworks through reflection on experience. Although this study offers a good theoretical framework to examine teachers' collaborative practice, such a large scale project (two-year study conducted by a research team with teachers from different schools) is difficult to conduct in an ordinary school context.

Not only the above studies, but also the other research studies report a number of benefits of collaborative reflection. Teachers gain confidence through information sharing and collaborative problem-solving (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Farrell, 1999; Gwyn-Paquette & Tochon, 2002; Miller, 2003;) and become updated in latest instructional approaches and methods (Bailey et al., 2001; Kwakman, 2003). However, these studies caution that successful collaborative inquiry cannot be achieved without trust and respect among teachers and administrators (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Farrell, 1999; Gwyn-Paquette & Tochon, 2002).

IV. METHOD

1. Research Questions

A qualitative case study was conducted at the college English program of the Y university, a large-scale private university located in Daegu. The purpose of the study was to describe part-time instructors' reflection and instructional shift through their participation in small group teacher meeting. Reflection was defined as instructors' recalling of their teaching and making conscious efforts to make changes in their teaching (Bailey et al., 2001). In addition, reflection in this study does not distinguish reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action but generally refers to reflection-on-action. The questions that guided the study were 1) What were part-time instructors' perceptions of small group teacher meeting?: and 2) What were the ways, if any, in which the meeting influenced their instructional practice?

2. Context

1) The Committee

When the data were collected, the college English program (will be used interchangeably with 'the program') at this university underwent considerable changes. The initiator of these changes was the Committee of College English Education (hereinafter called the Committee). The committee supervised all of the instructors who taught general English courses and provided them with administrative and instructional assistance.

At the Y university, the English Language and Literature Department (or the department) is in charge of the program. However, before the committee was established, the department did not provide substantive instructional assistance to instructors. All they did was to give instructors a course syllabus and a textbook to teach before a school semester starts. Realizing that the department was neglectful of providing instructors with instructional guidance, the department chair decided to form a committee that can solely devote to improving the quality of the college English program. The committee was officially founded in the beginning of the fall semester, 2004. Yet, in the previous semester, there were a series of groundwork. The department held several workshops for teaching demonstration, curriculum and syllabus design, and instructional strategy. The purpose was to encourage instructors to depart from traditional teacher-led teaching to a more updated and strategic teaching. Further, these events alerted a need of systematic program reform and eventually contributed to the birth of the committee.

The committee consisted of six faculty members-four (including two visiting professors)

from the English Language and Literature Department and two from the English Education Department. The committee meeting was held about once a month. The committee first established the common course objectives under the overarching goal of a learner-centered curriculum. They were: 1) to integrate reading with speaking, listening and writing; 2) to engage learners in group work for meaningful class participation; and 3) to teach reading strategies for fast and accurate reading. These objectives were to give instructors a general direction of the course and at the same time to maintain some degrees of consistency across teachers in their teaching. The committee then recommended instructors to participate in small group teacher meeting so that they can support one another under the new instructional objectives.

2) Teacher Meeting

The purpose of small group teacher meeting (will be used interchangeably with the meeting or teacher meeting) was to facilitate teachers' instructional discussion in an informal and collegial setting. There were initially four groups but one group soon became dysfunctional due to lack of cooperation among the members. Each group consisted of three or four members and was led by a leader. All of the leaders were the full-time instructors (including two visiting professors) and the committee members. Therefore, they had an in-depth understanding of the program goals and operational directions.

Each group met about once a month, and the meeting took about 1 hour and 30 minutes on average. In a typical meeting, group members first reported about what they taught in their class, and then the group leader gave the members a series of guiding questions—for instance, about instructional strategy, class materials, and classroom management—to activate the discussion. As such, during the meeting, group members discussed various instructional issues, shared their experiences and exchanged advice. Across groups, the meeting was run in a similar format because group leaders met regularly during the committee meeting, reported the progress, and set a future direction.

In order to facilitate the reader's understanding, the operational history of teacher meeting is summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Timeline of Teacher Meeting (including groundwork)

Spring semester ('04)		Fall semester ('04)	
Workshop		Teacher Meeting	
Apr.	Teaching demonstration	Sep.	Ice-break & discuss meeting direction
Apr.	Curriculum/syllabus design	Oct.	General issues
May	Instructional strategy	Nov.	General issues
		Dec.	General issues

* The exact meeting schedule varied from group to group

3) Participants

Nine teachers participated in the study. All of the teachers taught the same course ‘intermediate reading.’ Seven teachers were part-time instructors and two were full-time instructors. From now on, the term ‘teacher’ will be used for both part-time and full-time instructors unless a distinction is necessary. There were three male and six female teachers. The participating teachers’ identity was marked as T# (teacher) or GL# (group leader). Such marking protects their name from being disclosed.

TABLE 2
Background of the Participating Teachers

Group/Members	Teaching Exp. (year)	Gender	Overseas Ed. Exp.
Group 1			
GL1	3.5	M	TESOL PhD, US
T1	8	F	TESOL BA, Canada
T2	2	F	
(researcher)	4	F	TESOL PhD, US
Group 2			
GL2	12	F	
T3	6	F	
T4	7	M	
T5	7	M	TESOL Cert., UK
Group 3			
GL3 (researcher)			
T6	5	F	
T7	6	F	

4) Researcher’s Role

The researcher (myself) was one of the committee members and participated in teacher meeting as a leader and member. She was also a practitioner who taught the same course that the participating teachers taught. In this aspect, the researcher was able to approach the study in various perspectives.

3. Data Collection

Systematic data collection was conducted throughout the fall semester of 2004; however, actual–yet random–data collection had started since the middle of the spring semester of the same year as there had been a series of groundwork for small group teacher meeting. The

primary data sources included teacher meetings and interviews. Teacher meetings were not audio-recorded but logged for important details. Through teacher meetings the researcher could understand teachers' common concerns, issues, as well as each individual's attitudes, beliefs and styles of teaching. The interviews were conducted with eight participants because one participant declined for an interview. The researcher interviewed each participant mostly two times. Each interview ranged from 40 minutes and 1 hour. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. From the interviews, the researcher could retrieve more personal and in-depth information from teachers on their teaching and teacher meeting.

The secondary data sources comprised of workshops, committee meetings, informal talks with teachers, classroom observations, as well as teachers' syllabus and mid-term and final exams. While workshops and committee meetings helped to understand the general direction and progression of teacher meeting, the rest of the data provided supplementary information on teachers' instructional practice. Among these, observational data might need some explanation. The researcher observed seven instructors for one class session. She intended to observe all teachers regularly throughout the semester. The reason was to explore the ways in which teacher meeting affect their teaching in light of their instructional methods, strategies and techniques. However, with their reluctance of being observed, she was not able to pursue the original plan. Nonetheless, at least she could understand what their teaching practice in general was like.

4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed on an on-going basis. It help the researcher set the direction of the study and narrow down his or her focus (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & Steinmetz, 1991). On the transcripts and logs of the interviews and teacher meetings, she wrote marginal notes and highlighted important segments. These notes and highlights helped her search for emerging themes inductively and establish tentative categories. She then referred to the other data sources (i.e., informal talks, observations, and teachers' artifacts) to triangulate the findings (Creswell, 1998). In this process, categories from both the primary and secondary data sources were refined, sometimes being collapsed and other times being revised or discarded. This way, data were reduced (Creswell, 1998). For the finalized categories, both positive and negative evidence were considered (Boyatziz, 1998).

However, it should be noted that each theme (or sub-theme) at times was interwoven with the others.

V. FINDINGS

There were three pervasive themes. The theme represents participating teachers' collective voices but its sub-themes illustrates their convergent and divergent voices.

1. We Feel Uncomfortable

When teacher meeting was initiated, most teachers' reaction was puzzlement and resistance. They felt vulnerable of exposing their perceptions and thoughts to others (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Moreover, they were not sure what the purpose of the meeting was and some teachers even felt suspicious of it. The major reasons converged as follows:

1) Controlled by Authority

Before teacher meeting started, teachers were somewhat alerted for potential changes in the program. Nonetheless, when the meeting was initiated, most teachers felt controlled by the department. They looked defensive and uncomfortable.

During interviews in early October, some outspoken teachers stated:

T4: As far as I understand every teacher works hard. So I have felt a little upset when the department asked us to attend workshops and meetings.

T6: The meeting does not look natural. This is to check on us, I guess.

T7: The meeting is to see whether we teach the same way or not.

The other teachers refrained from making negative comments about the meeting, but the researcher could sense that they shared the discomfort the above teachers voiced. In fact, one teacher, who the researcher used to talk a lot about teaching, became very defensive when she asked the teacher for an interview and flatly declined it. She must have worried that her interview would work adversely to her.

A group leader GL1 also noticed teachers' concern. During an interview, he mentioned, "I understand that some teachers feel watched during the meeting. So, I have felt somewhat burdensome of leading the meeting." However, most teachers gradually changed their perceptions of the meeting from negative to positive.

2) Feeling Uncomfortable of the New System

Another reason that teachers did not welcome the meeting was they felt uncomfortable of the new system. Although teachers occasionally got together for an orientation in the

beginning of a semester or a party at the end, they never met regularly to discuss their teaching before.

Such change came in many forms. The following statements were from interviews and informal talks carried out in October:

T1: I saw many new faces in the meeting. So I felt uncomfortable.

T3: I feel somewhat inhibited of talking about teaching with other teachers.

T4: Before the meeting, we have to think a lot about what to talk.

T5: It is kind of cumbersome to come to a meeting. I have to make time.

Teachers, as illustrated above, had to get out of their comfort zone, interact with their colleagues, and spend time to think about their teaching, as well as invest extra time to attend the meeting.

For teachers' resistance to the meeting, the group leader GL1 reasoned in an interview, "Few people like change. Change is uncomfortable." This way, change can be painful because we have to unlearn what we have learned and become used to for a number of years and may need to alter our routine behaviors (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Kwakman, 2003).

In spite of most teachers' resistance against teacher meeting, they began to accept the meeting as part of their instructional routine. For instance, when the meeting date was approaching, and some teachers were unsure of what the date was, they called other teacher(s) in their group and asked when the meeting was and what they were supposed to prepare. Such phone calls often led to personal conversations.

2. Teacher Meeting May Not Be as Bad as We Have Been Thinking

After attending the meeting one or two times, teachers' perceptions shifted somewhat positively. What they liked in common was sharing information, working in a collegial atmosphere, and building confidence.

1) Sharing Information

All of the teachers unequivocally mentioned sharing information was the most tangible benefit of teacher meeting (Bray, 2002; Butler et al., 2004; Nicholson & Bond, 2003). While teachers shared information for many things, the ones they found most helpful included class materials, activities, and classroom management.

First, teachers benefited from exchanging class materials such as lesson plans, evaluation sheets, and articles. During a meeting, Group 1 exchanged lesson plans. GL 1 explained the

reason:

During the teaching demonstration workshop last semester, I sensed that most teachers taught without a lesson plan. No matter how experienced the teacher may be, it is difficult to teach systematically without a lesson plan. That's why I asked my group members to bring in their lesson plan.

Some of the group members did not know how to prepare a lesson plan. Thus, the leader showed a sample lesson plan to them. Next time the teachers met for the meeting, they exchanged lesson plans and discussed them. A group member (T2) commented, "It took time to think of how to make a lesson plan and type it up. However, it helped me organize my thoughts."

Not only lesson plans, groups also exchanged other class materials. A peer evaluation sheet for oral presentation was one of these. During a meeting in G3, the researcher shared the peer evaluation form with her group members. The reason was she learned through classroom observation of and interviews with teachers that they generally did not engage the audience students in any task during their peer's presentation; in these cases, many students tend to sit idle without attending to the presentation. Therefore, during the meeting, the researcher stressed the other teachers that peer evaluation is an effective tool to involve all of the students during an oral presentation activity. A few days later, one teacher actually told the researcher that she used the peer evaluation form in her class.

Second, teachers often discussed class activities because most of them had difficulties engaging students in interactive activities; before this semester, most teachers taught students in a lecture-format. During the meeting, an inexperienced teacher (T2) asked her group members how she could teach a reading strategy "getting a main idea" effectively to her students. A veteran teacher T1 immediately responded and gave specific instructions. In the next meeting T2 reported that she had positive responses from her students after using the strategy that she was told from T1.

Lastly, classroom management was another issue that concerned many teachers, in particular, inexperienced ones. Given that teachers had a large class size (averaging 60 students per class) and students of varying proficiency level, they had a number of issues to deal with our students (e.g., inattentive students, difficulty in getting all students motivated). In fact, the researcher had a difficulty dealing with irresponsive students who were determined not to talk no matter what she asked. When she talked about this during the meeting, a veteran teacher T7 said, "In such a case, you should not force them to talk. If you do, they will become more irresponsive. Just try to ignore and switch to another topic." This suggestion helped the researcher regulate her feelings and deal better with uncooperative students.

In brief, GL1's remark succinctly summarizes the benefits of teacher meeting:

The meeting can help us deal with various instructional issues. Teachers can selectively choose what they need. Therefore, it can be a medium for teachers to accumulate a host of instructional strategies and use them consciously in and out of the class.

2) Collegial Atmosphere

The atmosphere of teacher meeting slowly shifted from rigid to collegial. Collegial ambience makes a solid ground for collaborative reflection (Bailey et al., 2001; Kwakman, 2003; Miller, 2003; Weasmer & Woods, 2003). Teachers became less conscious of other teachers and talked more freely of their thoughts and shared information with their colleagues. Yet, such change did not take place simply as time passed by. Group leaders mentioned during interviews:

GL1: Teachers are already stressed for the meeting with the fear that they would be monitored by their group leader. So, I try not to impose my opinion but to give them autonomy during the meeting. Likewise, as a group leader I try to facilitate the meeting by making class objectives clear and let the teachers fill in with details.

GL2: As I am the most senior teacher in my group, the group members expect me to give them all the answers. Thus, one time I had to tell them explicitly that we are all professionals and we have many things to contribute to each other.

The leaders' remarks indicate that they tried to promote collegiality by giving teachers autonomy and showing respect (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). GL3 made similar efforts to make her group members feel comfortable and willing to share information.

There were, however, moments that group leaders should be firm. They experienced that some teachers were uncooperative at times. In fact, in Group 3, whenever the group members tried to set a date for the next meeting, one teacher habitually said, "I cannot come to the meeting. The [meeting] date does not work for me." Therefore, the leader firmly told her, "If you cannot come, it is okay. But, you know, some teachers come from a long distance just to attend the meeting even if they do not have a class." Since then, the teacher stopped saying, "I have no time."

Over all, in a collegial atmosphere where autonomy and respect were valued, teachers learned from each other and were motivated to work harder as noted in the following

interview statements:

T2: I like the meeting. I learn a lot by listening to other teachers. Also I like the way the meeting runs. Our group leader listens until all of us finish talking and then gives us his comments. He does not say, “Do this or do that.” If he said so, I would not feel like attending the meeting.

T4: Through the meeting, I could tell most teachers work hard and love to share what they do for class with their colleagues. So, it motivates me to work harder.

While regularly meeting for the meeting, teachers formed bond. Most teachers felt it easier to talk to the colleagues when they ran into each other. T3 said, “Now I feel at ease to talk to other teachers because we are used to seeing each other during the meeting.” Similarly, the researcher often engaged in professional discourse with other teachers when she happened to meet them on campus. As such, once a tabooed subject—asking about each other’s class—became a natural source of conversation for most teachers after teacher meeting was formed.

3) Building Confidence

While learning to share information and co-construct collaborative ethos through teacher meeting, teachers built confidence in their instructional practice. Gaining confidence is a well-manifested advantage of collaborative inquiry (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Farrell, 1999; Gwyn-Paquette & Tochon, 2002; Miller, 2003). For many teachers, gaining confidence may not be such an urgent issue as learning a latest instructional method. However, some teachers’ comments during interviews illustrate the pervasive role of confidence in their teaching:

T3: When I heard what other teachers taught in their class, I was relieved to see that I am not that different from them.

T4: After making test items, I was somewhat regretful of not asking for other teachers’ advice.

T6: No matter how hard I may work, I always feel unsure whether I do my job okay or not.

GL2: I think the greatest merit of teacher meeting is gaining confidence because we can compare our teaching with others.

Teaching tends to be an isolated activity. Therefore, teachers generally feel insecure of

what they do and long to be affirmed. In the above statements, confidence is noted as: not to be deviant from other teachers (T3); get others' advice and /or approval (T4, T6); be able to compare one's teaching with the other's and learn where he or she is at (GL2). Teacher meeting as such became an essential tool in building confidence.

3. We Are Becoming Professionally Grown

Through collaborative inquiry for various issues on instruction, teachers were growing professionally. Toward the end of the semester, teachers became more reflective, updated in latest instructional methods and strategies, and felt proud of participating in professional development.

1) Reflective

Teacher meeting has situated teachers as reflective practitioners (Butler et al, 2004; Farrell, 1999). The meeting prompted teachers to reflect upon their teaching. When the meeting date was approaching, teachers had to think of what they would report about their classes and what issues they would bring for discussion. One teacher (T3) actually mentioned, "I have to think hard because I sometimes forget what I did. So, before the meeting, I try to write down what I did."

The discussion during the meeting also made teachers reflective of their instructional practice as the following interviews illustrate:

T4: I don't think my teaching is bad. But when I hear from other teachers, I try to learn something from them and make it part of my teaching repertoire.

T5: Last time I heard of what other teachers did, such as class materials they used, group activities they designed, I was guilty that I did not do my best because I could tell some teachers work really really hard.

However, reflection should be differentiated from thinking because reflection implies conscious thinking to make changes (Hatton & Smith, 1995). After the meeting, some teachers ended up simply thinking while others did not. We could tell in the subsequent meeting how reflective and exploratory each teacher was by listening to them and seeing the materials and assignments that they brought in to the meeting. GL1 mentioned:

I was somewhat doubtful how seriously teachers think of teacher meeting. However, I noticed that T2 always tries to reflect change in her teaching. Therefore, despite of my wavering thought of whether the meeting is helpful

or not for teachers, I learned that our meeting somehow works.

In the meantime, in order to make teacher meeting more systematic and binding, group leaders assigned their group members a specific task or discussion topic for each meeting. For example, GL2 asked her group members to bring in their exams and discussed general issues on evaluation. Such a reflective opportunity helped teachers reflect upon their test construction practice and make changes (refer to Eun-Jeong Kim, 2005 for detailed explanation). Consequently, most teachers' final exams were more reflective of common instructional objectives (e.g., asking more questions on reading strategies and composing contextualized questions) than their mid-term exams.

Toward the end of the semester, T2 states during an interview:

Now I am grown a lot. I am teaching at two universities. Here, I see a lot of improvements in my teaching because the meeting makes me keep thinking of my teaching and try out new ideas. However, at the other university that I am teaching, no one shares information. Therefore, my teaching remains pretty the same even though I try to use some of the strategies that I've learned here.

2) Being Updated and Exploratory

In addition to being reflective, another conspicuous change was teachers became more updated and exploratory. Keeping up to date with new insights and developments is a core responsibility of teachers as professionals (Bailey et al., 2001; Kwakman, 2003). First, for learner-centered curriculum, a major course goal, teachers used group work. Group work is a much recommended instructional arrangement to foster communicative competence and meaningful participation of students in a class activity (Nunan, 1988; Pica & Doughty, 1985). Although most teachers had little experience with group work, all of the teachers stated in their syllabus that students were urged to actively participate in class activity through group work. Classroom observation illustrated most teachers worked hard to introduce group work to their classroom; however, probably due to their inexperience, a number of problems were noted such as unsystematic grouping, lack of interdependence among group members, and unclear instructions.

While most teachers were getting through a series of trials and errors in practicing group work, all of them agreed that:

It is less boring. I become less bored and my students become less bored. When I gave lectures in a traditional way, I often got sore throat and became bored. Also, there were always some students who fell asleep. But now

students rarely sleep because they have to participate in a classroom activity whether they like it or not (from an interview with T3).

However, interestingly, many teachers had some reservations on the utility of group work; while they acknowledged that student participation increased, most of them were unconvinced of whether students learn something through discussion with their group members or simply have fun chatting with them. This seemed to indicate that teachers were so used to a traditional teaching approach that posits the role of a teacher is to have students recite the information that he or she has imparted. Yet, one teacher T4 mentioned, “We should keep exploring new teaching methods. Otherwise, there will be no improvement in our teaching.”

Teachers also tried to engage students in meaningful learning through reading strategies. In an information era in which one is surrounded by a myriad of information, reading strategy helps learners find the information that they need effectively and efficiently (Oxford, 1990). It also helps them actively apply a reading strategy in their reading rather than depend on their teacher to explain the meaning of the reading line-by-line. Like in group work, most teachers were not used to teaching reading strategies systematically. They mentioned like T7 who said, “Actually I don’t teach reading strategies that much because I am not accustomed to it.” However, as teachers kept discussing what strategies they taught and how they taught students during the meeting, their perceptions gradually changed. The excerpts from interviews conducted in December illustrate these:

T3: In teaching paraphrasing, the examples in the textbook were so difficult that my students struggled with them. Then I remembered what the other teacher said about paraphrasing during the meeting and followed her strategy in the next session and it worked well!

T6: When I read instructions line-by-line, it [reading strategy] was not as difficult as it looked. So I felt somewhat at ease and taught exactly the same way as instructed in the textbook.

GL2: In the beginning I wasn’t sure how effective reading strategy would be but now I can tell. I always read aloud an entire article with my students and find a main idea and a conclusion with them. In the beginning, I had to correct them at times, but now they find the information pretty fast and accurately.

In spite of their initial inhibition, teachers were encouraged to try out new instructional strategies (i.e., reading strategies) and gained confidence through collaborative discussion, reflection and exploration.

Toward the end of the semester, one teacher (T3) stated, “I want this meeting to continue in the next semester. I learned a lot through this meeting.” Although all of the teachers may not feel the same way as T3 does, they generally agreed that teacher meeting helped them explore latest instructional approach and method.

3) Being Proud of Engaging in Professional Development

Although it was true that some teachers still had wavering perceptions of teacher meeting, most teachers felt proud of having the opportunity to improve their instructional practice.

Regarding the meeting, teachers’ common comment was “We’ve never heard of any other school that has such a meeting as ours.” Two teachers further added:

T5: I am happy to learn about latest teaching trend. If it were not for this meeting, I am sure that I must teach in the same old-fashioned way.

T6: If we keep continuing this meeting, don’t you think we will be number 1 teachers?

Teachers became proud of their professional development. Of course some might regard the meeting as extra work, making time for the meeting and being prepared. However, most teachers agreed that teacher meeting apprenticed them to be more reflective and exploratory in their learning and teaching.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

When teacher meeting was initiated, teachers thought that the meeting was aimed to control and monitor their instructional behavior and felt uncomfortable of attending it. Yet, gradually they experienced that the meeting could help them become better teachers through collaborative learning (Weasmer & Woods, 2003). Whether inexperienced or experienced, teachers realized that they had something to offer to each other from the experiences they had in their classroom teaching. Sometimes they got an excellent teaching idea from a veteran teacher, and other times they learned to solve a problem by discussing an issue that a novice teacher raised. Through collaborative learning, teachers were able to think of various instructional issues together and learn to regulate their learning and teaching.

When teachers were introduced to a new teaching practice, they felt uncomfortable because they had to unlearn what they had practiced for a number of semesters and learn a new way of teaching. Some teachers even felt daunted of trying out a new instructional

strategy – in this study reading strategy or group work. However, when they kept hearing from their colleagues about their trials and errors, teachers began to gain confidence that if other teachers did it, they could do it too. Moreover, by exchanging teaching ideas and sharing their experiences of successes and failures, teachers were encouraged to explore new teaching methods and strategies. Teacher meeting as such became a venue for teachers to practice reflective and exploratory teaching.

Although there are a great many resources for classroom teaching from research studies on various teaching methodologies to class materials, teachers learn best in their daily teaching context through collaborative inquiry (Bailey et al., 2001). In this study, when teachers were lone inquirers, they thought they were the only ones who had certain problems. But once they began to share information and communicate, teachers realized that they were not alone. Through emotional camaraderie, teachers became eager to share their thoughts and give co-constructive feedback to each other. Most of all, they felt happy that they were not forced but had autonomy in discussing how to make their teaching more effective during the meeting.

In this case study, small group teacher meeting became an effective tool for teachers to reflect upon their instructional practice and to explore new ways of teaching. However, teachers' initial fear that meeting would work as control mechanism by authority cautions a program administration, which wants to run a similar meeting to this, to be careful not to make teachers feel defensive but assure them that the meeting is to benefit them. In order to do so, the administration should give teachers some degrees of autonomy while providing general operational guidelines (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Also in order to foster more active participation of teachers, the administration might consider incorporating teachers' decisions made during the meeting into program operation. In this sense, teachers, who know their classroom most, can be the change agent.

Further, the role of group leader is important in running teacher meeting. In this study, as facilitators, group leaders tried to provide a comfortable ambience so that teachers could feel free to talk. They also assigned teachers a specific task for each meeting (e.g., bringing in a lesson plan) so as to sustain their meaningful participation. In order to keep teachers motivated and foster their active participation, group leader might need to frame teacher meeting progressively challenging. According to Vygotsky (1978), a learner needs an optimal challenge to move into a next level of learning in their zone of proximal development (ZPD: an assisted interactional space for cognitive development). Through collaborative efforts, both group leader and member can help each other to move along their ZPDs and eventually learn to regulate their own learning and teaching.

Over all, this study showed that even though most teachers were unfamiliar with latest instructional methods and strategies, they were apprenticed to practice them in their own classroom through small group teacher meeting. In an instructional climate in which part

time instructors are given few opportunities for sustained professional development (e.g., participating in a series of in-service teacher development programs), small group teacher meeting can be a powerful alternative. More importantly, in today's reality in which many universities heavily depend on part-time instructors for college English education, small group teacher meeting is an easily accessible and practical medium for teacher development. In this aspect, the findings of this case study is hoped to be of some insights to the college English program at other colleges and universities that are in similar situations to the Y university.

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