

Chapter 87

The Development and Change of Teachers' Strategic Knowledge in Teachers' Online Community of Practice

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ABSTRACT

To obtain the development and change of teachers' strategic knowledge in teachers' online community of practice (TOCP) in China, content analysis, video case analysis and statistical analysis methods were adopted to study 45 teachers (15 novice teachers, 15 key teachers, and 15 experienced teachers) from three participating schools during three phases. The development and change of different teacher groups' strategic knowledge and the general characteristics of their strategic knowledge have been concluded respectively. It can be concluded that TOCP has changed teachers' professional learning model, constantly improved their strategic knowledge and positively influenced different teacher groups' strategic knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

The wide use of Internet has led to the popularity of E-learning and E-training. Especially nowadays, more and more organizations and professional associations have turned to online network to support

its members' knowledge sharing and work-based learning, and finally to form community of practice (COP) for their professional development (Kearsley, 2000). However, researchers have pointed out that most E-training faculties know little about this new kind of online learning community, which is outside the "instructor-student-curriculum" environment (Garrison & Anderson, 2003).

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COP is very different from normal E-learning environments. From anthropological perspective, it connects formal and informal learning, and is especially useful for adults to learn through every day's reflective social practice. Wenger (2001) defines COP as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly."

In the past ten years, because of COP's irreplaceable role in promoting teacher training, more and more countries have invested a lot of money in creating and supporting sustainable educational COP. In their book *The Social Life of Information*, Brown and Duguid (2000) analyze examples of learning in the context of professional practice and then conclude, "Practice is an effective teacher and the community of practice an ideal learning environment."

From 2008, the authors and their research team began to conduct a series of research on teachers' online community of practice (TOCP) in China for nationwide elementary and secondary school teachers' professional development. We designed and developed a web-based support platform for TOCP, as well as accompanying twelve support services for teachers' professional development. Until now, we have conducted reflective practice in Beijing City, Shandong, Sichuan, Guangdong Provinces for more than three years. According to Prof. Yang (2011), in most cases, the major goal of online teacher trainings in China is developing ill-constructed their strategic knowledge in practice situation. This paper focuses on the development and change of teacher's strategic knowledge in TOCP. It reports the conclusions reached after years' reflective practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers' Practical Knowledge

Teacher knowledge is, in a broad sense, teachers' knowledge related to instruction (Han, Lin, Huang,

& Ma, 2008). Sulman (1987) also points out that teachers have subject matter knowledge as well as practical knowledge, which both shape their instruction and instructional behaviors. Any description about teacher knowledge should include these two kinds of knowledge. Thus, it can be inferred that teachers' knowledge is comprised of content knowledge and practical knowledge. Content knowledge includes subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Prof. Chen (2003) points out that teachers' practical knowledge includes teacher's beliefs, self-knowledge, interpersonal knowledge, situation knowledge, strategic knowledge, and reflective knowledge.

Teachers' Professional Development and Teachers' Community of Practice

According to Wenger (2001), communities of practice have the following three crucial characteristics to distinguish themselves from other learning communities:

1. Since a community of practice is focused on a domain of shared interest, membership therefore implies a minimum level of knowledge of that domain—a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.
2. Members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. That is how they form a community around their domain and build relationships.
3. Members of a community of practice develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice.

Wenger (2010) points out that "A community of practice is different from a *team* in that the shared learning and interest of its members are what keep it together. It is defined by knowledge rather than by task, and exists because participation has value to its members. A community of practice's life cycle is determined by the value it

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