

Micro-level episodes tell a tale: A look into an English language teacher's online professional development

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Abstract

Teachers who work in contexts where the institutional support in terms of professional development (PD) is either lacking or limited may seek other opportunities to develop their professional knowledge and skills. This study reports how an English language teacher, as a self-directed adult learner in such a context, perceives her professional growth after undertaking a PD activity facilitated and supervised by a more experienced former colleague through an online medium. The data elicited through semi-structured interviews and blog records was coded and analyzed according to Evans' (2014) PD model which attributes eleven dimensions of change to behavioral, attitudinal, and intellectual constituent of PD. Results indicated that there were interactions between and among change dimensions of developmental components in single micro-level episodes which shaped the bigger picture of PD of the participating teacher. Moreover, the participant reported to have seized the opportunity to examine her beliefs, knowledge, and practices critically, and initiated to challenge and revise her frames of reference, which eventually instigated transformative learning.

Keywords: Online professional development, self-directed learning, transformative learning, English language teacher

Introduction

A pivotal point in teachers' professional development (PD) research is apprehending how teachers learn and convert their knowledge to practice, which is conducive to students' learning (Avalos, 2011). Regarded as a form of adult learning, PD for teachers lays its foundations on the theory of *transformative learning* (Beavers, 2009). Mezirow (2000) points out that for transformative learning to take place, one has to experience a disorienting dilemma which may induce the critical examination of her/his values, assumptions, and beliefs. In fact, it is a process in which an individual transforms her/his perspective on the psychological, convictional, or behavioral levels. By critically reflecting on who s/he is as a self, on her/his assumptions and beliefs as well as on her/his lifestyle, the individual may develop new means of defining her/his world in a more rational and analytical way through "reformulating the meaning of their experience" (Cranton, 1994, p. 22). Such reflections may lead to the reconfirmation of current beliefs and perspectives,

or to the development of new and different understandings as well as alteration of frames of reference, all of which will shape and reshape an adult's learning.

Among teachers of all fields and disciplines, it is assumed that English language teachers experience various disorienting discipline-related dilemmas in practice (Borg, 2006) as well as discrepancies between what they have to and what they want to teach. These discrepancies tend to be perceived bolder when extensive cultural, attitudinal, and educational policy differences exist between the local periphery context in which English is taught as a second/foreign language and the context where teaching materials along with their corresponding curriculum, teaching strategies, and techniques are produced; that is, the center representing the hegemonic imperialistic and colonial character of English and English language education, imposing Western methods over local practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The concept of *learner autonomy*, described by Holec (1988) as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning" (p. 3), for example, has the potential to create such discrepancies. If/when interpreted as independence from a teacher, it is natural that both students and teachers would be puzzled about how

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to practice learner autonomy in their own historically and culturally teacher-centered educational context. At this point, the need for PD initiatives arises to inform, guide, and empower teachers by building “teachers’ everyday concepts about language, language learning, and language teaching to enable them to understand the scientific concepts about language, second language acquisition, learning, and L2 teaching” (Johnson, 2009, p. 14).

However, the concern that usually arises in taking the initiative in any PD activity is the question of whose responsibility it is: educational organizations’ or individual teachers’? In cases where institutional support is missing or fails to address the needs of individual teachers, self-directed learning (SDL), as a principle of andragogy, comes to teachers’ rescue. In a seminal work, Knowles (1975) defines SDL as “a process in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies and evaluating learning outcomes” (p. 18).

Nowadays, a commonly used platform for self-directed PD is the web-based environments that offer extensive experiences, opportunities, programs, or activities which, if well-managed, may lead to the achievement of objectives targeted by the individual teachers in endeavours for self-directed online professional development (SDOPD). Privileged by the easiness of access to and abundance of materials, yet, the Internet creates the challenge of ‘paradox of choice’ (Brockett, 2006). In other words, every self-directed learner may be overwhelmed by the plethora of choices and experience information overload (Kohan et al., 2017). Acknowledging that challenges and complexities are inherent in SDL, individual practitioners are encouraged to get engaged in self-directed online learning through reflective examination of their own beliefs and actions, seeking “to update and modify their knowledge and work in ways that are consistent with their developing views” (Leung, 2009, p. 53).

Given the background above, this study intends to report how a tailored online PD activity worked for a self-directed single Iranian English teacher as an adult learner in tackling a professional challenge she was concerned with. The study is based on micro-level PD as proposed by Evans (2014) and describes individual *episodes* which contribute to the understanding of the *bigger picture* of PD addressing the following research question:

‘What are the perceptions of the self-directed participating teacher as regards her professional growth after undertaking the offered online PD activity?’

Many studies have addressed English language teachers’ PD in Iran (e.g., Adel, Zareian and Mardekhoda, 2015; Alibakhshi & Dehviri, 2015; Asa’di & Motallebzadeh, 2013; Ashraf & Kafi, 2016; Ghanbari & Rasekh, 2012; Mohammadi & Moradi, 2017; Motallebzadeh, Hosseinnia & Domskey, 2017; Safari & Pourhashemi, 2017). Yet, what distinguishes this study from the previously conducted research on the PD of Iranian English teachers is deploying technology as a tool to offer and supervise PD. On the other hand, the scant number of studies (e.g. Alimirzaee & Ashraf, 2016; Ebrahimi, Faghih & Marandi, 2016; Mashhadi, Biria & Lotfi, 2020; Nami, Marandi & Sotoudehnama, 2016; Nazari & Xodabande, 2020; Zandi, Thang & Krish, 2014), which have used technology for PD of English language teachers in Iran, emphasize the effectiveness of *community of practice* for PD which involves joint enterprise, shared repertoire and mutual engagement (Somekh & Pearson, 2002). Hence, the void in the literature derived the researchers to investigate how an *individual* self-directed teacher undertakes and perceives professional growth via an online medium through a more personalized approach. This focus is based on the belief that “professional growth is possible when a PD program responds to teachers’ personal needs” (Lee, 2005, p. 41) by customizing professional growth plans.

Evans’ (2014) PD model as a framework

Giving a central agency to individual teachers, Evans (2014) posits that an effective PD demands vision, resourcefulness, flexibility, and awareness of the significance of considering and interacting with teachers as individuals who decide what is conceived as a *better way* depending on their priorities, goals, and agenda. Teachers’ reaction to the same stimulus may be considerably different and teachers would be engaged with new or different forms of ideologies or practices provided that they perceive them as improvements to their existing practices. Therefore, creating environments and offering PD activities through which such developments flourish and adult learning occurs would be a challenge for educators and PD facilitators.

Evans identifies eleven dimensions of change for her proposed model, which are categorized under three primary components: behavioral, attitudinal, and intellectual (see Figure 1). The behavioral

component comprises of *processual change* (changes to processes that people apply to their practice), *procedural change* (alteration of procedures within praxis), *productive change* (change in how much people do, produce, or achieve), and *competential change* (enhancement of competences and skills). The next component, which is attitudinal, encompasses *perceptual change* (modifications of beliefs, perceptions, and viewpoints), *(e)valuative change* (changes to practice- or professional- related values), and *motivational change* (changes to morale, job satisfaction level, and motivation). Lastly, intellectual component includes *epistemological change* (changes to knowledge base and structures), *rationalistic change* (change to the nature and extent of reasoning applied to practice), *comprehensive change* (augmentation of understanding and knowledge), and *analytical change* (change to the nature and degree of analyticism applied to work).

The model suggests that change often occurs across more than one component. However, for PD to occur, it does not require change to take place in every single dimension. Furthermore, Evans (2014) asserts that PD is multi-dimensional which comes about through a chain of reactions at micro-level; that is, one change would lead to another, which subsequently makes a cycle of chain-reaction episodes.

In this study, Evans' (2014) model was adopted because contrary to other PD models (e.g., Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Desimone, 2009; Guskey, 2002), it grants a central agency to teachers. It also examines cognitive aspects of PD with a focus on distinct episodes of PD and conscious tendency of teachers to find *better ways* through reflection and experimentation which entail teacher outcomes as opposed to student outcomes.

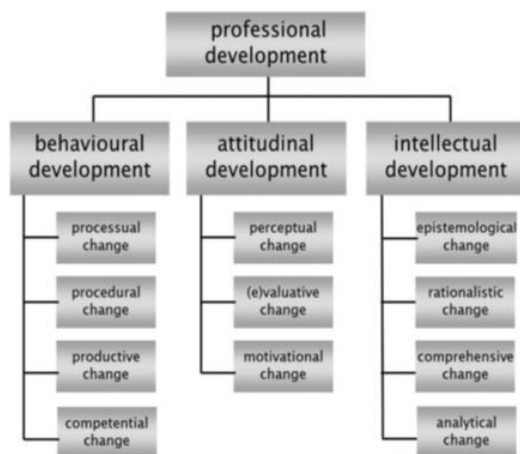


Figure 1. The Componential Structure of Professional Development (Evans 2014)

The Study

The inspiration for this study came from an email received by the first author, who was living abroad for study purposes at that time, from a former colleague. The message was a request for support from an English language teacher who was concerned with the notion of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness in theory and practice. Further correspondence with the teacher revealed that lack of institutional/collegial support in her workplace had instigated self-directed learning for PD; however, lack of knowledge about the subject matter (i.e., learner autonomy and learner-centeredness) had left her with the paradox of choice dilemma. Therefore, to respond to her quest, in collaboration with the second author who is an experienced teacher educator as well, an online platform was launched to offer a PD initiative. In order to explore and describe perceptions of a single Iranian English teacher towards the effects of an SDOPD activity on her professional growth with a focus on micro-level PD definition proposed by Evans (2014), we adopted a qualitative case-study design as it allows the participant to tell a story (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) through describing her perceptions and views of a certain issue -PD in this case- and consequently creates a rich and reader-friendly description of the phenomenon under investigation.

The researchers' role

In order to carry out the study, the first author played a dual role of both supervisor and researcher while the second author actively took part in designing the study, monitoring the content of the offered online support, and analyzing the data. Following the concept of differentiated supervision proposed by Glatthorn (1984, cited in Winton, McCollum & Catlett, 1997), the first author adopted a supervision role in self-directed development. According to Glatthorn's definition, self-directed development leads to the professional growth of an individual who works on a PD activity *independently*, and the supervisor acts as a *source of knowledge and information* for him/her. "Although the teacher will, for the most part, be working independently, it is expected that the designated leader will play an active role as a resource for the teacher suggesting sources, exchanging ideas, reflecting with the teacher about issues, and providing support throughout the program" (p. 58).

It should be noted that the offered online teacher professional development (OTPD) initiative was an independent effort on the part of the

researchers and was not supported or sponsored by any organization or institution. Therefore, no certificate could be granted to the participant.

The participant

Anahita (pseudonym), following up her own initial request, agreed to be the only *participant* in this study. Prior to the onset of the research, as a rule of ethics, Anahita was provided with all the required information regarding the study and was ensured that confidentiality would be strictly kept. She was also asked to fill out an informed consent form.

Anahita was a master's graduate of English language teaching (ELT) and had taught English to students of different levels and ages for nine years at the time the study was initiated. To start her career as an English teacher, she had taken a written exam and an oral interview. Then, she had attended an intensive teacher training course (TTC) for one month, where she learned the basics of teaching practice as well as approaches and techniques of communicative language teaching. At the end of the training period, she did a twenty-minute demonstration teaching a unit from the book taught at the institute to other student teachers attending the TTC. After successfully passing the TTC, she became eligible to start her career as a certified teacher.

Although Anahita had ELT educational background, she admitted that she vaguely remembered many of the theoretical materials she was taught at university and in many cases she could not relate theory to practice due to the nature of the education she was offered. Evaluations of some master's programs in TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) in Iran reveal that they are not as effective as they should be and are in need of revision and reformation. Students in bachelor and master programs in TEFL/ELT are required to pass mainly theoretical courses with the least focus on practicum.

Moiinvaziri and Razmjoo (2016) assert that many of the TEFL/ELT master's graduates acknowledge their lack of skill and competence in teaching practice. In another study, Taheri and Abbasian (2016) infer that the existing courses in M.A. programs hardly address the knowledge and information which prospective teachers need to deal with real challenges in their teaching practice. They further suggest that because the majority of M.A. graduates in TEFL/ELT gain employment in private English institutions, some courses such as teaching English to adults or teaching English to children need to be added to the curriculum.

Moreover, according to Tajik, Mirhosseini and Ramezani (2019), the majority of teacher training courses in Iran share some general shortcomings such as "lack of opportunity for student teachers to have actual teaching experiences" (p. 1383), "failure to help teachers overcome teaching frustrations" (p. 1384), "failure to develop teacher reflection", and "ignoring educational technology tools" (p. 1387). In the case of Anahita, considering the short TTC she had passed, she was trained basically to handle a class in the institute she intended to teach at, and not much beyond that.

Anahita described her students as teacher-oriented and attributed this to the personality of the students, their cultural and social background as well as lack of knowledge of teachers, including herself, with regard to the concept of learner-centered instruction. Confirming her observations, a recent study lists a number of barriers impeding learner autonomy and learner-centeredness in Iran. The contributing factors include lack of learner readiness and familiarity, learner passivity and lack of motivation, lack of teacher's professional knowledge, lack of effective teacher (re)training initiatives as well as contextual deterrents such as role of the policy-makers, cultural impediments, uncooperative parents, and insufficient facilities (Moradi & Alavinia, 2020). Anahita admitted that she had never made any deliberate or systematic effort to encourage her students to develop autonomy; yet, she believed in the necessity of minimizing the amount of teacher-centeredness in her teaching approach.

Overall research design

In order to describe the phenomenon of professional growth of the participant, semi-structured interviews and text analysis were used as sources of data collection. To minimize the potential of researcher bias, we used the member checking technique. To verify the accuracy and credibility of the collected data, we asked the participant to review the transcriptions and interpretations of the findings and check their trustworthiness (Birt et al., 2016)

Data was collected in three phases. First, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the participant via Skype in order to inquire about her educational and professional profile and background, and to elicit information about her specific lacks and needs in terms of PD as well as her perceptions and views towards the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centered instruction.

In the second stage, based on the data obtained

in the first phase, a blog entitled *Teacher Professional Development* was developed on a free Web 2.0 environment (edublogs.org). Selecting the most appropriate materials for her teaching context was challenging when considering the abundance of such materials available on the

Internet. In keeping with Grenier (2010), for adult learning to occur, an individual learner should be involved in determining the learning objectives but with the means which are controlled by the facilitator (the supervisor in this case). Therefore, eight objectives to be achieved (see Table 1) were determined in consultation with Anahita.

Table 1. Objectives and Materials

# Objective	Material(s)	Type
1 Developing an awareness of the concepts of professional development, and learner-centeredness	Professional development (1 &2)	Video
	Learner autonomy	Slide show
	What makes a good teacher	Video
	Peer observation and teaching practices	Video
	Reflective teaching	Video
2 Knowing teaching and learning theories related to the concept of learner-centered teaching	History of language teaching	Video
	Teaching styles	Article
	What teaching style is best for today's students?	Article
3 Knowing students better as regards learner types and learning styles	Learning strategies	Video
	Individual learner differences	Video
	Younger learners	Video
4 Developing skills to interact with learners and motivate them to promote learner autonomy and learner-centeredness	Mixed-ability teaching	Article
	10 commandments for motivating language learners	Article
	Motivating language learners to succeed	Article
5 Learning how to apply class management strategies based on learner autonomy principles	Classroom management strategies	Article
	Classroom management strategies for difficult students	Article
6 Knowing how to integrate technology into teaching	Integrating technology into the classroom	Video
	Blogs	Video
	Online videos	Video
7 Training autonomous learners through practicing particular tasks and activities	Best classroom techniques	Video
	Best books for language learners	Video
	Best ideas for teachers of English	Video
	Posters	Video+article
	Teaching speaking techniques	Video
	Dictogloss dictation	Video
	Using flashcards	Video
	Contextualizing language	Video
	Building language awareness	Video
	Integrating skills	Video
	Pair and group work	Video
	Authentic materials	Video
	Critical and creative thinking skills	Video
	7 reading strategies your ESL learners must know	Article
	How to teach writing	Video
Teaching reading in an ESL classroom	Video	
Strategies for teaching reading		
8 Utilizing means of evaluation and assessment consistent with principles of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness	Feedback	Video
	Giving feedback in speaking activities	Video
	Alternative assessment	Video

Based on these objectives, articles, videos, and a slide show were uploaded considering a number

of criteria. For example, since the time Anahita could afford to work on the online environment

was limited, relatively brief articles with some convincing theoretical input and a lot of practical suggestions were chosen. Moreover, she had introduced herself as a visual learner; therefore, several videos representing classroom teachings from all over the world were uploaded to enable her to see the real teaching contexts, and observe the teacher and learner conduct to compare with, and further reflect on her own teaching context.

In order to encourage Anahita to critically reflect on what she read or watched on the blog, she was requested to leave comments or answer

the questions posed, and also to record her personal experiences and reflections on the blog after she practiced the posted theories, activities, recommendations, etc. The two screenshots below are examples of her comments on postings labelled: *Individual Learner Differences* and *10 Commandments for Motivating Learners*.

Throughout the implementation period which lasted for 14 months, Anahita's views and feelings about the relevancy of materials were monitored by sending her messages, and in some cases, according to her comments, new postings were added to the blog.

Anhita's Comments on the Blog

The screenshot shows a comment on the 'edublogs' platform. The comment is dated October 9, 2015, at 6:00 pm. The user 'anahita' discusses the lack of self-access or learning stations in their institutes, mentioning a class with students aged 15 to 53. They note that older students are passive and do not like drama or role plays. The comment also mentions extending activity types for home work and concerns about students copying information from the internet.

The screenshot shows a comment on the 'edublogs' platform. The comment is dated November 15, 2015, at 1:45 pm. The user 'anahita' discusses motivating students, particularly introverted, shy, or low-proficiency students. They mention that commandment number 7 is effective and suggest asking students 'why learning English' at the beginning of each semester to help them find their goals. The comment concludes by stating that knowing the answer to this question can help students become more autonomous.

In the last stage, Anahita's perceptions and views towards her PD with respect to the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centered instruction were explored through an interview via

Skype.

Data analysis

Data collected from the semi-structured

interview conducted prior to the implementation of the PD initiative mainly helped the researchers to get to know the participant, and identify her specific needs, lacks, and challenges. Moreover, it was used as guidance in making decisions about the objectives and content of the blog. The first interview was fully transcribed and analyzed descriptively. However, it should be emphasized that, the answers to the final interview and comments left on the blog determined which preliminary data would be further used. We only applied the data and information which gave us the opportunity of comparison and contrast to identify changes in the participant with regard to her

potential professional growth.

To analyze the data, six phases of thematic analysis were used as follows: 1) familiarization with data, 2) setting initial codes, 3) seeking themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) labeling themes, and 6) reporting the findings (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). In order to manage the data, a pre-existing template consistent with Evans' (2014) PD model was utilized. Then, codes were assigned to first- and second-order themes as illustrated in Table 2. To clarify the coding approach used, some examples have been provided in the same table. The accounts are selected randomly but for each second-order theme code at least one instance is provided.

Table 2. Theme Codes

First-order theme codes	Second-order theme codes
Code #1 Behavioural development	Code 1.1 Processual change Code 1.2 Procedural change Code 1.3 Productive change Code 1.4 Competential change
Code #2 Attitudinal development	Code 2.1 Perceptual change Code 2.2 (E)valuative change Code 2.3 Motivational change
Code #3 Intellectual development	Code 3.1 Epistemological change Code 3.2 Rationalistic change Code 3.3 Comprehensive change Code 3.4 Analytical change

Examples

- [Code 2.2][Involving parents and using technology are two good points of this activity.] [Code 3.2][This would work for the learners who are shy and more introvert and do not like to present in front of their classmates.] / Blog
- [Code 1.1 & 1.2][Therefore, first I grouped them into pairs so that they can help each other remember the sentences.][Code 1.3] [The next time they did it individually and it was lots of fun.] / Blog
- I imitated it and [Code 1.3] [got great reactions from my students.] [Code 1.1 & 1.2] [They were encouraged to exchange ideas with each other and correct their peers in their own groups. Then as a whole class they corrected the sentences with my guidance.] [Code 1.4] [I'm going to do this again.] / Blog
- [Code 3.3] [After watching this video I understood I have to extend the activity types which need to be done at home to give each student to work at his/her own pace.]....[Code 3.4] [The only concern is that they can copy from different sources especially when they are given a writing task.]...../ Blog
- [Code 2.2][The video gave me the idea that it

would have been much easier if the setting of the class was not that formal being equipped only with a board, some chairs which were too big and uncomfortable for them, and a video player]..../ Blog

- but following this text [Code 3.1] [I learned that I have to give reasons and clarify the purpose of my feedback for the learners. If they feel there is logic behind a feedback they will take it more seriously and learn better.] / Blog
- [Code 1.3] [When I entered the class the next session, I saw them sharing what they had done with each other and checking how many words they had in common.] / Blog
- It (the PD initiative) helped me to review the things I already knew.....[Code 2.3] [It helped me to become more confident and autonomous.] / Interview 2
- Reading and watching on the blog was interesting and easy for me. I thought it would be the same for my students and [Code 1.4] [decided to create a blog....I practiced....did the first steps to see how it look likes and works]...../ Interview 2
- to discuss what's going to be observed....and [Code 2.1] [try to look at it (peer- observation)

as something helpful and constructive, not for finding fault with or criticizing each other.] / Interview 2As proposed by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009), a code was assigned to a text chunk, obtained from blog comments and the second interview's transcription, representing a theme pertaining to change dimensions of Evans' (2014) PD model. For securing the dependability of the qualitative study, the same body of data was coded by both researchers separately. To check the consistency of coding, percent agreement measure was used to assess inter-rater agreement. Calculations yielded an agreement of 80%. Therefore, to clarify points and reasons of disagreement, the decisions already made were discussed and a final

agreement was sought. A code-recode approach was also employed after a 2-month interval to make sure data analysis was done consistently. Hence, the same set of data was given to the same researcher to conduct coding, which resulted in a 90% consistency rate between the first and second coding by the same researcher.

Subsequently, the themes encoded with the same code number were compiled in a file and were labelled to express the theme they represented (see Table 3). It should be noted that the themes which were repeated with a higher frequency were listed and reported in Table 3. This approach yields a detailed analysis of some aspects of data which is mainly driven by the analytic interest of the researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 3 Categories of Change and Pertaining Themes

Behavioural development	Attitudinal development	Intellectual development
<p>The process of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - informal assessment - pair and group work - in- and out-of-class activities 	<p>Perception towards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teaching as a career - constructive teacher observation - concepts of professional development, teacher autonomy, learner autonomy, and learner-centered classes 	<p>Epistemology of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - principles and elements of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness - different learning and teaching styles/techniques
<p>The procedure of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - peer feedback - teacher feedback - learner's self-monitoring and assessment - in- and out-of-class activities - pair and group work 	<p>Evaluation of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teacher-student interaction - class environment - techniques of informal assessment and feedback giving - advantages of use of technology 	<p>Rational of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional development - practicing learner autonomy and learner-centeredness principles and techniques (e.g., decision making, pair and group work, peer feedback-giving)
<p>The production of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learner motivation - learner autonomy - learner-centered vs teacher-centered classes - development in learner performance - positive learner feedback 	<p>Motivation for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - professional development - assuming more responsibilities for developing teacher and learner autonomy 	<p>Comprehension of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the importance of using technology - the importance of informal assessment by the teacher - the effectiveness of self and peer monitoring - learner types and learning styles - the importance of out-of-class activities
<p>Competency in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the use of technology - interactive skills - informal assessment and feedback giving - learner-centered class management 		<p>Analysis of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the atmosphere of the classes - the role of teachers in motivating learners - different ways of developing learner autonomy (e.g. out-of-class activities)

Findings

Throughout the analysis of the data, different instances and episodes of change in the participant, in terms of her PD, were identified and categorized under the developmental components proposed by Evans (2014).

Behavioral development

Evans (2014) defines behavioral development as the process through which professional performance of a teacher is modified and enhanced with a level of permanence that transcends transitoriness. The participating teacher of the present study was exposed to a variety of worked-out examples of class performance as well as expert recommendations delivered through short articles, all cohered around the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. Consequently, several instances of the effects of the blog content as far as processual, procedural, productive, and competential dimensions of behavioral development are concerned were observed. After watching a video depicting a class discussion task, Anahita commented that:

Actually, class discussion is what I always do. But after watching this video I changed my approach. I chose the topic of technology and made two sub-topics: a) Computers and the Internet, b) Cell phones and mobile applications. I made two groups of 5 and asked every individual of each group to write about the assigned topic covering the functionality, advantages, disadvantages, etc. The next session, they discussed what they had written in their own group and noted the similar and different points they had touched in their writings. Each group appointed two people as the spokesmen. They came to the board and wrote the points they had come up with. I asked them to sit in front of the class and run the discussion. They proposed their ideas and the rest of the class expressed their agreement, disagreement, or extra information. It was really a hot discussion. I sat among the students and joined the discussion. I know many teachers do this activity but the feedback I got was valuable. They had searched the Internet, had found and printed charts and graphs showing the statistics about what they were discussing. They defended themselves providing evidence. Though I had not asked them to do so! (Example 1/ Blog)

In the above example, evidence of processual, procedural, productive, and competential changes in facilitating a class discussion activity can be traced back to a worked-out example in a video. Anahita clearly stated that class discussion is a

common activity in her classes, but according to the new technique introduced to her, she changed her approach or the *process*. To simulate the activity, she chose steps or *procedures* different from what she usually did; that is a) choosing the topic, b) grouping the students, c) assigning a writing task to cover different aspects of the topic as an out-of-class activity, d) in-class and within-group discussion, e) appointing spokesmen, and finally, f) running the class discussion by the spokesmen. As regards the *productive* change, Anahita mentioned that she got significant positive feedback from her students. Despite not being asked, the students had prepared printed charts and graphs as well as relevant statistics to deliver to the class, which can be interpreted as a sign of increased learners' motivation. It is also assumed that she went through *competential* changes as she felt she could develop her skills in running a learner-oriented class discussion.

In another case, after watching a video showing different techniques of doing pair/group work in the class, Anahita's comment revealed a degree of change in her performance in terms of the output produced by replicating a suggested activity. She stated that:

The second example was really brilliant! I imitated it and got great reactions from my students. They were encouraged to exchange ideas with each other and correct their peers in their own groups. Then, as a whole class they corrected the sentences with my guidance. I'm going to do this again because I checked the same points we had practiced the next session and found that most of them did not make any mistakes, so I concluded that they had learned. (Example 2/ Blog)

The positive feedback she received from her students and their outstanding learning outcome can be taken as an achievement which is a *productive* change for the participating teacher.

Although Anahita admitted in the first interview that she was not good at using technology, being influenced by the blog as the PD environment as well as a number of blog postings encouraging the use of technology, she made *competential* change as far as the use of technology is concerned. She said that:

The videos I watched on the blog were a reminder that it is the time of technology and the new generation of students is very good at it. For me, watching and reading on this blog was easy and interesting. I think it's the same for my students. So I decided to create a blog for one of my classes. (Example 3/ Interview 2)

She also began assigning her students to use

email more frequently for the exchange of writing assignments for peer correction and feedback. By doing so, in addition to *competential* change, it is assumed that she went through *processual* and *procedural* changes as regards out-of-class pair work and peer feedback-giving.

Attitudinal development

Attitudinal development is defined by Evans (2014) as the process through which work-related attitudes of people are modified and consequently would lead to enhanced professionalism with a level of permanence which transcends transitoriness. As a result of the exposure to the content of the blog, the participating teacher reported some attitudinal developments in the comments left on the blog and through her responses to the second interview questions. Comparing this data with her answers to the first interview questions revealed some changes in motivational, evaluative, and perceptual dimensions. Before getting engaged in the PD activity, Anahita stated that she was not familiar with the concept of professional development and her random efforts such as “participating in the institute’s teachers meetings or compulsory workshops” were merely because of the financial incentives given.

She mentioned the lack of awareness and the lack of training provided by the institutes as well as the lack of time and authentic resources as some of the factors demotivating teachers to develop professionally. However, later she came to believe that PD should be an area of concern for every individual teacher to change teaching from a habit to a passionate pursuit. After participating in the PD activity she said: “I have started to know myself better as a teacher....seeing other teachers, the way they work, and how motivated they are, motivated me as a teacher”. Regarding the change in the way she conceived PD compared to her previous mindset, she pointed out: “...contrary to what I assumed at the beginning, doing this activity was not time consuming, and I can tell you that it was not a waste of time...but really beneficial”. Believing in the importance of PD, Anahita further explained “...now I know that I should not wait for the institute administrators to do something for me. I have to be more independent and keep myself updated through different sources”. We interpreted all these as *perceptual* and *motivational* changes contributing to attitudinal development of the participating teacher.

Two of the outstanding instances of evaluative change (Examples 4 & 5), in the process of PD for

Anahita, were teacher-student interaction, and techniques of informal assessment and feedback-giving. Admitting that her classes were mainly teacher-oriented, Anahita was impressed by the atmosphere of the classes, in terms of teacher-student interactions, depicted in the videos. Consequently, through self-reflection, she (re)evaluated what was going on in other contexts compared to her classes and concluded that she had to change the way she interacted with her students. She stated that:

I have increased my individual interactions [with the students]. It is very useful because they feel that they are important to me and, for example, if I speak about the performance of a student individually, she/he feels that I know what’s going on and I care about her/him. I think this makes them feel more responsible and motivated to improve. (Example 4/ Interview 2)

In the first interview, Anahita articulated that assessment was a challenge for her because she, as a teacher, was never involved in preparing tests which are the main types of formal assessments done in every institute. She also underestimated the significance of informal in-class assessment and feedback-giving because their results were not reflected in the final scores of the students. However, in the second interview, Anahita said:

After comparing, reflecting on, and evaluating what experts recommended and teachers did in other contexts, I learned how to assess the performance of my students particularly in speaking and writing skills....I decided to teach and ask my students to monitor themselves and give feedback to their peers. I believe this is something they have to do to improve and are able to do if I give them some guidelines. (Example 5/Interview 2)

Not having a clear perception towards the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness along with the belief that developing them is not “the main goal of any English institute” in her context, Anahita asserted that “we as teachers cannot develop learner autonomy on our own because we have to follow the lesson plans and syllabi given to us. In addition, our students are brought up in a school system which is teacher-centered and does not train autonomous learners”. However, during her involvement with the offered PD activity and by getting more familiar with the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness, she said: “I want to adopt and practice some more techniques [of learner-centeredness and developing learner autonomy] because I can see good results in my students” (Example 6/ Interview 2). In another comment, she

clarified that:

In the previous interview, I told you that I didn't have a clear perception of learner autonomy. Although now I know that some of the practices I have always done in the class help to develop learner autonomy, I didn't know the purpose or how they would contribute. Now I practice them consciously. I know what the purpose is, and also I know how to do them better. (Example 6-1/ Interview 2)

These comments can be interpreted as signs of a shift in Anahita's perception towards the concepts of learner-centeredness and learner autonomy, and her increased motivation as she found practicing the principles and techniques of learner-centeredness quite feasible.

Intellectual development

Evans (2014) describes intellectual development as the process whereby professional-related understanding, knowledge, and reflective or comprehensive capability or competence of an individual are revised resulting in enhanced professionalism with a certain level of permanence that transcends transitoriness. Intellectual development encompasses epistemological, rationalistic, comprehensive, and analytical change dimensions, some of which are traceable in the accounts already given. Yet, a number of extracts from the collected data illustrate various dimensions of intellectual development in the participating teacher. In response to a question about learner autonomy in the second interview, Anahita expressed that:

Now, I know what learner autonomy is and how to develop it to a large extent but I need more practice. I mentioned before that this blog was an eye opener. I learned that I can make a change perhaps not in all of my students; but I'm sure I can help them to become autonomous. It's good for me too because it shifts some of the responsibilities from me, as the teacher, to the students themselves. (Example 7/ Interview 2)

She further maintained that "...there are many things I still need to learn, but what I learned through this activity was really effective because they covered my everyday needs. I already knew some of the materials theoretically, but I learned how to put them into practice more systematically" (Example 8/Interview 2). The above quotations can be interpreted as an *epistemological* change in terms of knowledge enhancement as regards the concepts of learner-centeredness and learner autonomy, in theory and practice, which were the core themes of the blog content. Another

outstanding instance of *epistemological* change was modification of the knowledge structure of the participating teacher concerning different learning and teaching styles which she described as "challenging issues that are usually ignored because of the teachers' lack of awareness". After being provided with a couple of short articles about learner differences, it seems that she went through both *epistemological* and *comprehensive* changes. She stated:

I vaguely remember I had read about these issues at university. At that time, I was not teaching, so I couldn't practice them. But now that I am a teacher, I can see the different learning styles in my students.... It is necessary to understand these differences and help your students accordingly. Now I am able to notice and distinguish their differences better and pick a better teaching style. (Example 9/ Interview 2)

In the examples below, instances of rationalistic and analytical changes can be traced. After watching a video about peer feedback-giving and practicing some of the recommended techniques, Anahita commented that she didn't like oral in-class peer feedback much, especially in speaking tasks, with the *rationale* that it causes a degree of embarrassment for the speaker who has been corrected for a mistake/error or received feedback. It is noteworthy that as Anahita did not perceive this as a *better way*, but quite unsatisfactory, it cannot be interpreted as a *rationalistic* change at this stage. However, following her own rationale, she thought of a *better way* of implementing peer feedback-giving. She commented that "peer feedback works better in group or pair works where I cannot monitor the performance of all of them at the same time" (Example 10/ Blog). Anahita further articulated that "it would be a good idea to ask the students to record their performance, exchange it with a peer and get feedback" (Example 10-1/ Interview 2). Then she went through the analysis of the novel implementation of certain techniques and developed an ameliorative *rationalistic* change which encouraged her to use them persistently. This particular case is in keeping with Tillema and Imants' (1995) observation that knowledge restructuring is not merely the replacement of the old with new concepts. It is the teachers who decide which new elements of knowledge to accept and integrate, or discard.

Succession of change dimensions

In Evans' (2014) professional development model, change in one dimension under a certain developmental component is followed or preceded

by change dimension(s) in other developmental components. In other words, there are interactions between and among change dimensions in single micro-level episodes, which shape the PD of an individual. Therefore, tracing and linking successions of discrete change dimensions is important in understanding an individual's PD and learning journey. The examples below demonstrate such successions that have taken place in the participant's PD:

The videos I watched on the blog were a reminder that it is the time of technology and the new generation of students is very good at it. For me, watching and reading on this blog was easy and interesting. I think it's the same for my students. So I decided to create a blog for one of my classes. (Example 3/ Interview 2)

Influenced by the blog content, Anahita's *perception* towards the use of technology changed (attitudinal development) as she acknowledged the need and significance of technology integration into in- and out-of-class activities contributing to learner autonomy. She developed *motivation* (attitudinal development) to practice and *competency* (behavioral development) in the use of technology. On the other hand, the more she developed the competency in the use of technology, the more motivated she became to use it.

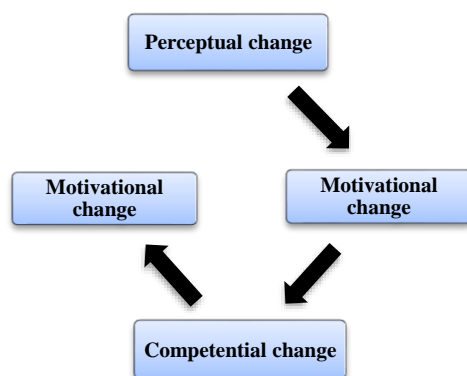


Figure 2. Successions of Change (Example 3)

After comparing, reflecting on, and evaluating what experts recommended and teachers did in other contexts, I learned how to assess the performance of my students particularly in speaking and writing skills....I decided to teach and ask my students to monitor themselves and give feedback to their peers. I believe this is something they have to do to

improve and are able to do if I give them some guidelines. (Example 5/Interview 2)

In example 5, reflection and *evaluation* (attitudinal development) were at play which led to a change in her *perception* (attitudinal development) towards informal assessment, and consequently boosted her *competency* (behavioral change) in assessment and feedback-giving especially in speaking and writing skills.

I want to adopt and practice some more techniques [of learner-centeredness and developing learner autonomy] because I can see good results in my students (Example 6/ Interview 2).

In the previous interview, I told you that I didn't have a clear perception of learner autonomy. Although now I know that some of the practices I have always done in the class help to develop learner autonomy, I didn't know the purpose or how they would contribute. Now I practice them consciously. I know what the purpose is, and also I know how to do them better. (Example 6-1/ Interview 2)

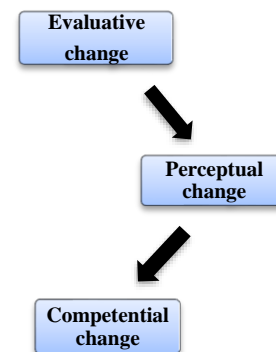


Figure 3 Successions of Change (Example 5)

Referring to examples 6 and 6-1, by raising awareness and gaining a new *understanding* (intellectual development), Anahita developed a new *perception* (attitudinal development) towards the concepts of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness. Then, she started (*re*)evaluating (attitudinal development) techniques shown on the videos, compared to her own class practices, which caused her to implement new *processes* and *procedures* (behavioral development) for doing tasks, and in- and out-of-class activities. It is noteworthy that after implementation of new *procedures* and observing the positive outcomes in learners (behavioral development), Anahita was *motivated* (attitudinal development) to adopt more new techniques to put into practice in the class (behavioral development).

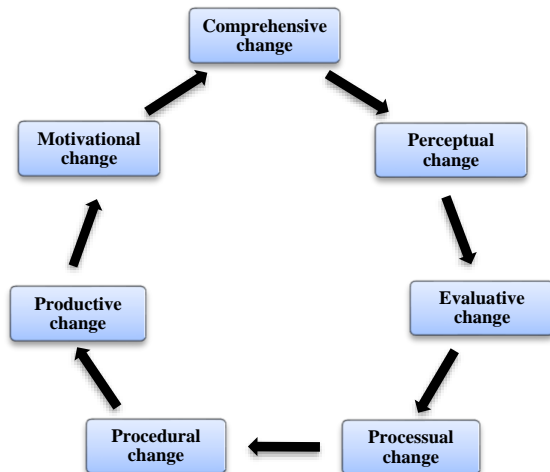


Figure 4. Successions of Change (Examples 6 & 6-1)

I vaguely remember I had read about these issues at university. At that time, I was not teaching, so I couldn't practice them. But now that I am a teacher, I can see the different learning styles in my students.... It is necessary to understand these differences and help your students accordingly. Now I am able to notice and distinguish their differences better and pick a better teaching style. (Example 9/ Interview 2)

Example 9 shows that *epistemological* and *comprehensive* changes (intellectual development), in terms of acquiring knowledge about and developing understanding of the different learning styles in practice, resulted in the *competency* (behavioral development) of the participating teacher in pinpointing differences of her students' learning styles.

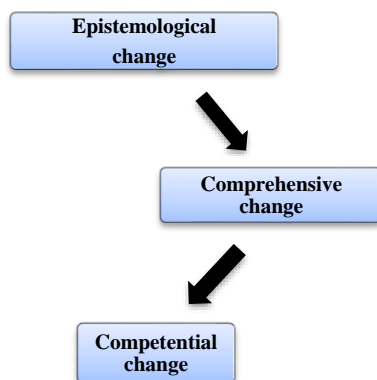


Figure 5. Successions of Change (Example 9)

Similar to the three-component PD model of Evans (2014), Jarvis (2006) observes that learning occurs through cognitive, emotional, and physical

changes in an individual, which requires access to one's brain. Therefore, distinguishing certain dimensions of change and their order of occurrence would be a meticulous and an elusive attempt. It should be acknowledged that, in every account summarized above, there are many other potential change dimensions in interaction to contribute to the PD of the participating teacher, which remained unidentified.

Discussion

This study is an attempt to explore and describe perceptions of a single Iranian English teacher towards the effects of an online PD activity on her professional growth with a focus on micro-level PD definition of the model proposed by Evans (2014). The findings embody Evans' (2014) model through real examples manifesting micro-level development which leads to the increment of the individual's professionalism by means of mental internalization processes. This mental cognitive process incorporates what Illeris (2003) describes as a psychological internal process of elaboration and acquisition in which current impulses are linked with preceding learning. These considerations underpin a PD conceptualization which covers learning (intellectual and attitudinal aspects) as well as activities (behavioral aspect) towards an individual's change and development.

One of the distinguishing features of the PD activity in the present study was appreciation of the participating teacher's individuality. Bates et al. (2016) highlight the need "to study individual types of online professional development and not to make assumptions about their effectiveness" (p. 26) which further corroborates the emphasis this study puts on one individual teacher's professional growth through a medium and content that were tailored for a single teacher's needs and wants. Individually-guided activities provide teachers with plenty of opportunities to get involved in self-analysis and self-reflection. These types of activities seem to be unattached to the principles of developmental theories as there is no apparent interaction between two individual people with the exception of the minimal interactions with the first author in our case. However, Vygotsky (1981, cited in Eun, 2008) clarified that "even the most private spheres of human consciousness retain the social nature found in concrete interactions. All mental or internal processes possess social character because even in individually-guided thinking processes, those forms and functions used in social interaction manifest themselves" (p. 143). In cases, some barriers prevent teachers from engagement in

more formal collaborative PD endeavors (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003). Therefore, they might prefer to spend their spare time on particular professional issues of their concern in a more flexible way, as described in this study.

Being self-directed, problem-oriented and motivated, and having a reservoir of experiences as well as learning needs, the participating teacher possesses the qualifications of an adult learner as proposed by Knowles (1980, cited in Gravani, 2012; Merriam, 2001). Therefore, it can be said that the process of transformative learning, as a form of adult learning, has been instigated on the part of the participant. Upon arousal of a problematic issue (i.e. learner-centeredness and autonomy) in her teaching practice, the participating teacher began examining her beliefs, knowledge, and practices critically, and attempted to challenge and revise her frames of reference. This is in keeping with King's (2002) view which asserts that by providing teachers with opportunities for investigating a variety of applicable classroom practices through examples, simulations, and immersion (hands-on experiences), an environment can be generated to contribute to considerable adult (transformative) learning which, as emphasized by Jones and McLean (2012), can be personalized through the use and implementation of technology.

Conclusion and Implications

Based on the findings of this study, it can be inferred that the offered online PD, personalized for an individual self-directed teacher, worked efficiently to promote both transformative learning and professional development. However, considering the large number of teachers who are in need of PD, it might not be time- and cost-effective to design and administer a PD initiative customized for each teacher. Hence, relying on the findings of the present study, PD facilitators, may be advised to group teachers of similar interests, needs, and challenges, and set up online support initiatives while being fairly confident that *individual* professional learning and development is in progress without any need to urge creating a *community of practice* or encouraging the members to discuss or exchange ideas.

Acknowledging that the nature of qualitative case studies is not context-free and the conclusions can rarely be generalized (Gay et al., 2009), to respond the research question concerning experiences and perceptions of an individual teacher, adopting a case study approach, which does not seek to generalize as a methodology of inquiry (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011), was mandatory.

Nevertheless, we believe that the research process, procedures, and findings of this study have the potential of transferability as the reader may connect and identify with the situation and setting (Gay et al., 2009) depending on the degree of contextual similarities. As a case-oriented single case study, this research attempted to make sense of the case as a singular interpretable entity. According to Ragin (2001), each case-oriented research can contribute to the conduct of a series of case studies, that is, each study is building on the previous one.

It is also noteworthy that the findings of the present study rely only on self-report measures. Although Yin (2009) considers *verbal reports* as valid evidence for case studies, in order to achieve more robust conclusions as regards PD of teachers and changes in the performance of their students, further research is required to observe the actual behavior of individual teachers, and evaluate their students' achievements through appropriate measures. Moreover, surveying students' perceptions towards their teacher's PD can be recommended for future studies as a way to possibly corroborate the teacher's data.

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