

Language Instructors Learning Together: Using Lesson Study in Higher Education



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Abstract The post 9/11 context brought a heightened awareness of the critical need to develop translingual and transcultural competence in language learners. This chapter takes up the question of what role—and what form—professional development for language instructors can take in the overall task of increasing students' language proficiency levels. It details a qualitative, interventionist study which examined how participation in an inquiry group mediated the conceptual development of three world language instructors in higher education. The study is framed by both activity theory, which informs an understanding of the inquiry group's situatedness in their sociocultural-historical context, and microinteractional analysis, which allows a view into how the turn-by-turn construction of meaning in the inquiry group created affordances for teacher inquiry. The findings of this study support the view that a combination of periodic workshops and sustained instructional inquiry groups can be particularly effective in promoting teacher conceptual development.

Keywords Professional development · Inquiry group · Lesson study · Developmental work research · Activity theory · Higher education · World language · Microinteractional analysis · Proficiency · Teacher learning

1 Introduction

In considering the task of building language learners' proficiency levels, a central concern, from my perspective as a language teacher educator, is the question of how to *continually* develop the pedagogical expertise of language *teachers* (MLA, 2007). The present study is situated broadly within the question of how professional

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development can be leveraged to support the ongoing revitalization of language teachers, particularly in regards to their understanding of and ability to teach for proficiency.

In agreement with Rifkin's argument (this volume) that *The World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning* "help us as a field move away from an exclusive focus on the teaching of grammar, while providing instructors with a framework in which to purposefully construct lessons focused on using the target language...", I ask what role and form professional development might take to maximize teachers' productive use of that framework.

Professional development often takes the form of the one-shot workshop. Yet even the most intentionally designed workshop, characterized by a multidirectional flow of ideas and opportunities for practice, *can* be limited in long-term impact. I am not arguing that this is always the case, simply that it can often be the case. Instruction and inspiration, while crucial, are alone insufficient; the implementation of new pedagogies—like teaching for proficiency—must be scaffolded and supported over time if they are to become resilient elements of a teacher's practice.

The project I discuss in this chapter was borne out of my questions about how to design professional development in ways that might accomplish this goal: that of building new and resilient elements in a teacher's practice. In this qualitative, interventionist study, I used a combination of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 2015) and a derivation of Developmental Work Research (a CHAT-inspired methodology) (Engeström, 2009) to make sense of how participation in an inquiry group mediated conceptual development for three world language instructors in higher education. Specifically, I asked: How do elements of a multilingual language instructor inquiry group serve to mediate language teacher conceptual development within the broader sociocultural context? Using both content and microinteractional analysis, I examined mediating means along a continuum between turn-by-turn construction of meaning and the surrounding sociocultural-historical context. In this chapter, I discuss several elements of this inquiry group that served to mediate language teacher conceptual development. These included: engagement with conflicting pedagogical concepts in discussions, structure and dynamics of those discussions, direct and indirect observation of each other's teaching, and meta-reflection mediated by transcripts of previous group meetings.

1.1 Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

To examine the various mediating means of language teacher conceptual development in this particular inquiry group, I drew on the theoretical framework of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). Rooted in the sociocultural tradition, CHAT describes a dialectical linking between individuals and society; CHAT examines how individual agency interacts with *seemingly* fixed socioeconomic and political structures (Engeström, 2009). CHAT, ultimately, provides a way of theorizing how the complex elements in an activity system afford and constrain the

goal-directed activity of individuals and groups (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Engeström, 2009; Sannino, Daniels, & Gutiérrez, 2009). These affordances and constraints include not only mediating means (both material and symbolic), but importantly the current and historical community context of the individual, the rules governing behavior (both spoken and unspoken), and the power structures functioning in the environment (Engeström 2009; Johnson & Golombek, 2011).

CHAT directly informed my methodological decisions in this study. I took an interventionist approach, using my own derivation of a CHAT-inspired methodology: Developmental Work Research (DWR) (Engeström, 2009). In DWR methodology the researcher first uncovers contradictions that exist in and between the various activity systems inhabited by participants. The researcher then mirrors those contradictions back to participants in order to stimulate a heightened awareness of the shared, culturally-mediated activity. This mirroring is called the “first stimulus.” After mirroring these contradictions back to the participants, the researcher then introduces a new symbolic or concrete tool (the “second stimulus”) into the system (Engeström, 2015). For participants, the second stimulus serves as a mediating means to help them address contradictions in their system(s). For activity theorists, the second stimulus allows mediation to be observed at the microgenetic level. In the case of this study, informal meetings between the instructors and myself functioned similarly to a first stimulus, and lesson study was utilized as a second stimulus. To my knowledge, only one other study (Tasker, 2014) has combined CHAT, DWR, and lesson study in the context of foreign language learning in higher education; in that study Tasker completed a lesson study cycle with three EFL teachers in the Czech Republic. Using grounded content analysis, Tasker (2014) identified five major findings: (1) “decision-makers” must be actively involved in professional development if there is to be institutional change, (2) outside experts must take on a more active, longer-term role, (3) EFL teacher professionalization should include participation in professional development activities, (4) lesson study can serve as a viable ‘second stimulus’ in DWR methodology, and (5) sociocultural theory provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how teachers learn through participation in lesson study (Tasker, 2014, p. iv). Methodologically, Tasker’s study serves as an illustrative example of how DWR and lesson study can work synergistically to serve the needs of both teachers and theorists. What his work did not do, and what the present study aimed to accomplish, was document how this framework might also be useful in promoting and tracing teacher learning in diverse, multilingual groups of teachers who neither teach the same language nor even necessarily work within the same administrative structure.

1.2 *Teacher Inquiry Through Lesson Study*

Lesson study (*jugyou kenkyuu*) is a form of teacher inquiry originating in Japan over 100 years ago (Lewis, 2006; Lewis & Tsuchida, 1998; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999; Yoshida, 1999). This unique approach to teacher professional development became

popular in North America beginning in 1999; though taken up across disciplines and contexts, lesson study has been most enthusiastically received in elementary mathematics (Fernandez & Chokshi, 2002; Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004; Lewis, 2006). Lesson study brings teachers together to identify a problem of practice, collaboratively study that issue, and then create a “research lesson” applying ideas gleaned from that process. The research lesson is then taught to a live group of students as the other teachers observe. The process concludes with group reflections on *student* learning during the lesson (Yoshida, 1999; see also Lewis & Hurd, 2011; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). The goal of lesson study is that the one lesson serves as a vehicle for teachers to explore their research goals (Fernandez & Yoshida, 2004, p. 7). In large part, this can be accomplished because lesson study requires a persistent focus on *student* learning (rather than *teacher* actions) throughout the process.

2 Methods

2.1 Context of Study

Over the course of one academic year, I worked with an inquiry group composed of myself and three female, non-tenure-track world language instructors from a research-intensive university in the Midwestern region of the United States; Hinata and Yukiko taught Japanese, Amina taught Arabic (all pseudonyms). All three women were native speakers of the language they taught, originally from countries speaking those languages. They had a wide range of experience, ranging from Hinata’s four and half years of teaching, to Amina’s eleven and Yukiko’s twenty-four. Though all had entirely or primarily taught in higher education, all had also received K-12 training.

At the time of the study, there was a college-wide focus on building student language proficiency. This attention to proficiency spurred both renewal of existing professional development programs and creation of new opportunities. The women in this study were members of supportive programs and were already actively involved as learners and leaders in various professional development initiatives within their language programs and across the institution. They were active participants in college-wide workshops, and had also attended weeklong, intensive institutes organized by the university’s Title VI National Language Resource Center. Finally, and concurrently with this study, both Yukiko and Amina took on leadership roles in an advisory board tasked with designing professional development for language instructors across the college. In sum, the participants in this study were already actively engaged in the development of their teaching practice before joining this study’s inquiry group. With this in mind, I wondered how membership in an *ongoing* effort, like an inquiry group, might layer onto their existing participation.

Over the course of one academic year, the inquiry group in this study met seven times (see Table 1). We began meeting together in the Fall term to exchange ideas

Table 1 Overview of sessions

	Session	Date	Content
1st stimulus	1	10/29/2014	Informal meeting
	2	2/6/2015	Informal meeting
	3	2/25/2015	Informal meeting
2nd stimulus	4	4/1/2015	Formal beginning to modified-lesson study cycle
		4/6/2015	Video of Amina's lesson sent to group ^a
	5	4/10/2015	Debrief of Amina's lesson ^a
		4/13/2015	Observation of Hinata's class
	6	4/20/2015	Debrief of Hinata's lesson
7	5/1/2015	Meta-reflection	

^aNot included in the current chapter

and provide collegial support to one another. The group came together in an organic way; it was the instructors, not the researcher, who invited each other. Early meetings were informal and unstructured. For example, at one meeting, Amina and Yukiko brought an Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) that they were designing and asked the group for feedback. Over the course of these first three sessions, we got to know each other in ways that functioned similarly to the first stimulus in a DWR cycle. The organic nature of the group's origin was invaluable toward building trust within the group. Indeed, the genesis of this group is consistent with how Wenger describes the evolution of communities of practice in institutional settings: "Because communities of practice are organic, *designing them is more a matter of shepherding their evolution* than creating them from scratch. Design elements should be catalysts for a community's natural evolution" (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 51 emphasis added). In this spirit, I inhabited the roles of researcher, facilitator, and "outside advisor;" the latter role especially was itself a mediating means central to both the DWR and lesson study frameworks.

The introduction and adapted use of lesson study served as the second stimulus in this DWR-derived intervention cycle. I introduced the idea of using a modified form of lesson study as a model for our work going forward, and we discussed how to modify it for our context. The most obvious challenge we anticipated was that the women did not share an instructional language or level. For this reason, the group decided that they would adapt lesson study and not collaboratively create a shared lesson; instead, they would focus their work on observing each other's teaching and together considering how to build and sustain student engagement.

Having uncovered various contradictions during the first three sessions, the last four sessions were devoted to using lesson study as a mediating means to explore some of the uncovered contradictions. The group completed two partial inquiry cycles, the first focused on Amina's teaching, and the second focused on Hinata's; this chapter is an examination of the second cycle. During this second cycle, we observed Hinata teach a 50-min lesson, gathered a week later to debrief her lesson, and finally, met 10 days after the debrief for a meta-reflection. The meta-reflection

was stimulated by participant reading and discussion of the transcript of the debrief of Hinata's lesson.

2.2 *Data Analysis*

I analyzed the data using content and microinteractional analysis. I focused first on the sociocultural and sociolinguistic context using a CHAT-informed content analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) of interviews and field notes. Deductive coding was informed by the Activity System Observation Protocol (ASOP), an analytical tool informed by CHAT and designed to guide researchers looking at activity documented in their fieldnotes (Lewis & Scharber, 2012).

Having analyzed and described the broader context, I then focused my analysis on elements of the inquiry group serving as mediators of language teacher cognition. The data that informed this stage of analysis were: the videorecording of Hinata's lesson, audiorecording of the debrief session after that lesson, researcher notes, materials used in Hinata's lesson, Hinata's written reflection, and finally, a presentation that Hinata, Yukiko, and I had prepared at the conclusion of the inquiry group's work. I coded data deductively for moments of contradiction and mediation, and then inductively coded those moments in order to make sense of what was happening in (and as a result of) those conversations. Finally, I used microinteractional analysis to examine how the *structure* of the group conversations, especially during these moments of contradiction, was itself a mediating means in teacher development. Using detailed transcriptions of salient moments (Jefferson, 2004), I examined turn-taking patterns, including cooperative interruptions (Liddicoat, 2011; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2000).

3 Findings

3.1 *Mirror Data: Uncovering Contradictions*

Over the course of the three initial meetings, the group's conversations began to revolve around common tensions. Two fundamental contradictions emerged, one related to using the textbook as a tool, and the other related to gaining and keeping student engagement.

The instructors discovered that they shared a sense of dissonance between textbooks designed with no particular context in mind, and their own need to meet the specific learning needs of students in the context of their classroom. This contradiction between curricular design and implementation is widely shared by teachers of all disciplines across both K-12 and higher education. Specific to world language education, Guerrettaz and Johnston (2013) documented how an instructor creatively

leveraged a textbook in the “ecology” of the language classroom to support student learning in ways the textbook author could not have predicted. This research has been praised by language materials experts (Garton & Graves 2014). Just as in Guerrettaz and Johnston’s (2013) research, the instructors in this study had both the space and knowledge to skillfully adapt the content of their textbooks to the ecology of their classrooms and the goals outlined in the ACTFL standards. They experienced this contradiction in an expansive way, empowered to make professional decisions about the implementation of their curriculum.

The second contradiction that emerged in these discussions focused on student engagement, which was referenced as an implicit criterion for decision-making in lesson planning and curricular choices. By “student engagement,” the instructors seemed to picture students who were active, cheerful (as read through facial expressions, laughing), and diligent (studying outside of class). There was also the assumption that an engaged student would use the target language as much as possible during class. That these qualities and behaviors would lead to higher levels of language proficiency was the implied goal; however, to have students enjoy the classes and the process of learning a new language was the directly spoken goal. The women agreed that planning with student interest in mind went a long way toward the end of “student engagement.” Concrete examples of this type of planning emerged during the initial sessions. For example, Hinata and Yukiko talked during an early meeting about how student interests had driven the design of their IPA unit. The contradiction in this case revolved around the question of *how* to leverage textbooks in curriculum design in ways that might increase student engagement and ultimately proficiency.

3.2 Lesson Study as a Mediating Artifact

In both DWR and lesson study, participants need to identify a problem space where they want to focus their energy. In the case of DWR, uncovered contradictions within and between activity systems inform the choice of this problem space; in lesson study, it is teachers’ perceived *gaps in student learning* which guide the inquiry. The women in this study chose to focus on student engagement; in particular, they decided to interrogate *how to leverage their textbooks in curriculum design in ways that might increase student engagement*. This chapter focuses on how the group took up this salient problem space during the second teaching observation, the debrief of that observation, and the meta-reflection on the debrief.

An illustrative example of how the group took up work within this problem space can be seen in how they talked about engaging students in vocabulary learning. Below, I describe the salient mediating means utilized (implicitly and explicitly) by the instructors as they made sense of promoting vocabulary learning. I conceptualize these mediating means as falling into three overlapping categories which related to: the content of the conversations, the conversational structure (i.e., turn-taking and cooperative interruptions), and the methods of lesson study (i.e., observation of

others, both as disruptive to one's own experiences and pedagogical training, and as suggestive of new possibilities; meta-reflection mediated by transcripts of previous meetings).

Engagement with Conflicting Pedagogical Concepts At the debrief, an initial and powerful observation made about Hinata's teaching was the high percentage (90%+) of target language used by Hinata and her students during class. Sparked by this observation, the ensuing conversation centered on vocabulary learning in relation to authentic materials and target language usage. This makes sense; in order to use authentic materials and the 90%+ target language usage which ACTFL advocates, teachers must accept that *students can make sense* of language input *they haven't explicitly been taught*. In Excerpt 1 below, the women take up this dilemma.

Excerpt 1: "Using Target Language"

Source: *Hinata's Debrief/Time stamp: 00:05:22-00:07:15*

- 1 Amina: But I I see the students also like using the target language|and [you said this is=
 2 Hinata: [ah:::::::::::::]
 3 Amina: =first class to teach this topic|[so I'm curious to know did you (.) like teach
 4 Hinata: [mm mm
 5 Amina: = the vocabulary be↑fore|or you give them a sheet to study at ↑home|or
 6 [anything like that?]
 7 Hinata: [yeah::::::::::::] so we have (.) vocabulary sheet right? ↑|And=
 8 Amina: =so they study at home the vocabulary and then they come ready for the topic?
 9 Hinata: n::::: (h) ((laughter)) [I would eh say::::: (.) not always.|You know like=
 10 Yukiko: [not always ((laughter))]
 11 Amina: =okay.|
 12 Hinata: =there some really serious students who do preparation at home=|
 13 Amina: =okay.|
 14 Hinata: and then they know already like [(.) what vocabulary they use in cla[ss]
 15 Amina: [okay] [okay]
 16 Hinata: but I I would say like maybe half of the students haven't prepared yet (.)|but you
 17 know uh the the activity that I did was like just using I used my textbook,| and
 18 the vocabulary is also in the textbook too,|
 19 Amina: okay|
 20 Hinata: and then the first, um=
 21 Amina: =but I mean, if the [vocabulary in the textbook, do they know the meaning?=
 22 Hinata: [yea[h] mm::=
 23 Amina: = like, what [is the meaning?]
 24 Hinata: [yeah actually this (.) textbook has the:: >you know like
 25 eh< English and Jap[anese].|
 26 Amina: [oh, okay, English and [Japanese.v
 27 Hinata: [Both on the same page|[so they=
 28 Amina: [okay okay
 29 Hinata =can you know, like look back. | And, yeah, although that this topic was first

- 30 introduced on that day that I was demonstrating, but, mmm, for their warm-up
 31 activity they are, they were not you know like uh you know like uh expected to
 32 use new vocabulary.]
 33 Beth: mm mm mm=
 34 Hinata: =even though I was introducing like what's social network and then what does it
 35 mean to your life. | And, but you- they can use like you know already learned
 36 vocabulary | like so (.) yeah |

At the beginning of the excerpt, Amina introduces a question for the group's consideration: *How is it that Hinata's students are able to use the target language on the first day of a new unit?* In this question, she tests her assumption that students would need to learn the vocabulary explicitly through the use of vocabulary sheets with direct English translations. In the lines that follow, Hinata confirms that her students did indeed receive vocabulary sheets, but adds complexity to this response, explaining that the target language usage the inquiry group had observed at the beginning of the class only required students to use known vocabulary. A few minutes later, and in response to my follow up question on how well she thought students understood her, Hinata adds further complexity to her description of what vocabulary teaching and learning look like in her classroom.

Excerpt 2: "For example, I say"

Source: Hinata's Debrief/Time stamp: 00:07:35-00:08:20

- 1 Hinata: right and then I'm not controlling my use of vocabulary. You know like I
 2 sometimes you know use obvious you know like the you know students the
 3 words that students might not know, obvious[ly].
 4 Beth: [mm mm mm [mm mm [mm
 5 Hinata: [but I just you know
 6 anyway I fuse £it.¹ But like, you know, um if students know the eh you know
 7 like important words. For example I say like "please listen" and then something.
 8 So, "listen carefully" and then like *chuui shite kiite kudasai* and then if that
 9 carefully part cannot be understood, but student might know that oh teacher
 10 want us to listen to,
 11 Amina: I think it's like um like they get used to a routine, that's why they understand,
 12 yeah
 13 Group: ((various sounds of agreement: "ah:::" "yeah yeah yeah" "right"))

In this excerpt, she explains that she does not "control (her) use of vocabulary" and sometimes uses "words that students might not know." She then gives a concrete example of the phrase "*chuui shite kite kudasai*" (literally, "listen carefully

¹The symbol £ indicates laughter while talking (as distinct from laughter apart from words). Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an Introduction. In G. H. Lerner (Ed.), *Conversation Analysis: Studies from the first generation* (pp. 13-23). Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

please”) to argue that, though students might not understand *chuuu shite* (carefully), they could still grasp the more frequently used *kite* (listen) and *kudasai* (please). Through this example, she asserts that language learners do not need to understand every word that they hear or read.

Twenty minutes later, the question of how students could have made sense of *words that hadn't been explicitly taught* returns, this time in the context of discussing an authentic text Hinata had used in her lesson. The focus of the observed lesson had been on friendship and social networking. One goal Hinata had was to introduce students to the popular Japanese messaging service LINE (similar to Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp). She accomplished this by having students examine four charts displaying statistics related to the various social media (e.g. LINE, Twitter, Facebook) used by Japanese college students. Just before Excerpt 3 below, and after commenting that students had struggled with this activity, Hinata asked us if, “even with kind of limited ability to read, do you think it’s still kind of effective?” Amina responded that it depended partially on the goal of the task, saying: “like what information they need to find or this graph is about.” Hinata then translated for us exactly what the questions were asking. For example, she explained that the first question asked “What kind of social network Japanese college students used.” At this point an individual in the group wondered aloud about Hinata’s decision not to define new, potentially confusing vocabulary on the handout. Would doing so have made the activity, based around an authentic material, inauthentic? Excerpt 3 displays the conversation that followed.

Excerpt 3: “100% authentic versus modified version”

Source: Hinata Debrief/Time stamp: 00:29:23-00:31:60

- 1 Hinata: well, yeah that’s my kind of, the tension between using 100% authentic versus
2 modified version
- 3 Beth: well, so, you and probably Yukiko as well could best understand what students
4 were saying. How do you feel based on what they were saying. How do you
5 sense what their comprehension was? Do you feel like this was something that
6 they mostly got? or were really confused about? or...and if confused, where did
7 you sense the barriers?
- 8 Hinata: mmm. so first two graphs, those are simple, it’s just like listing up, like
9 Yukiko: in social networking
- 10 Hinata: so these are simple, but the second and third one, it is actually asking like. this
11 one is how often do you use facebook? and these are kind of tricky—because it
12 says, I don’t use it
- 13 (): mmm
- 14 Hinata: yeah and then they don’t know that word, so only Chinese students could
15 understand
- 16 Beth: could understand it
- 17 Yukiko: and also like eh LINE LINE LINE is like a some Japanese, mostly Asian know
18 probably, I don’t know myself so the thing is like eh I think that Hinata just
19 present this one first and then explain what LINE is () later and she was saying

- 20 I'm going to explain later.
- 21 Beth: mmm
- 22 Yukiko: I don't know, was it, probably it'll be better to talk about LINE first
- 23 Beth: mmm
- 24 Yukiko: because LINE use
- 25 Hinata: ahh
- 26 Beth: that's an idea
- 27 Yukiko: I know like you want like eh critical thinking you know this thing they come up
28 with oh okay something like social networking and particularly like Japanese or
29 Asian populations. But I think it's too much probably, probably it's better to just
30 say, it's in Japan and there is one more thing, like listing up, I think there's
31 something like uh maybe have students what kind of social networking
32 resources

Hinata explicitly names the surfacing contradiction in line 1: “Well, yeah that’s my kind of, the tension between using 100% authentic versus modified version.” In doing this, Hinata opens up the dilemma for deeper inquiry.

In response to my prompting in lines 3–7, Hinata then goes on to describe the “trickier” elements of the charts that might have been barriers to learner comprehension. For example, in line 14 she points out a particular kanji that only Chinese students, able to use their knowledge of Chinese characters as context clues, would have been able to make sense of. In line 17, Yukiko also points out a possible area of confusion: the application “LINE” is likely unfamiliar to the non-Asian students in the class. Yukiko then transitions the conversation from a focus on identifying problems to suggesting changes. Between lines 17 and 20, she suggests that it would have been better to tell students from the beginning of the activity that “LINE” is a popular texting application in Japan. She asserts in line 29 that the inquiry-based approach that Hinata took, where students would discover this information through analyzing the charts, was “too much probably.”

This tension (providing authentic input vs. scaffolding or modifying the input) surfaces again later in the interaction; Hinata responds (line 1) with the honest statement that she’s not confident she strikes the right balance.

Excerpt 4: “I’m not 100% sure”

Source: Hinata Debrief/Time stamp: 00:38:50-00:40:50

- 1 Hinata: oh yeah. (.) I'm still, as a teacher, I'm not 100% sure which one is better↑
- 2 Beth: mm hmm
- 3 Hinata: so we're doing integrated performance assessment and then for the IPA part
4 they, uh we don't put any assistance (.) you know, like
- 5 Group: ah:::
- 6 Beth: [mhm
- 7 Hinata: [so I wanted to practice↑ and then get, [y'know, students used to [this
8 (): [ah::: [oh:: kay

- 9 Hinata: because in the real world they don't have
 10 Beth: right
 11 Hinata: like an English word ((laughter)) They have cell phone to check out

Beginning in line 1, Hinata explicitly names the tension (just as in Excerpt 3, line 1: “I’m still, as a teacher, I’m not 100% sure which one is better” She goes on to explain her rationale (lines 23–31, with backchannels removed for ease of reading):

So we’re doing integrated performance assessment and then for the IPA part they, uh we don’t put any assistance (.) you know, like, so I wanted to practice↑ and then get, y’know, students used to this, because in the real world they don’t have like an English word ((laughter))

In line 11, the conversation takes an unexpected turn when Hinata presents a counter argument to the claim she has just made (that students don’t have access to English translations in the real world). In line 11, Hinata asserts that they *do* have that access in the real world, through use of their cell phones, introducing the interesting possibility that using digital technology to look up English translations *is* actually an authentic practice. Still, having students wrestle with texts in order to discover the meaning of new words takes more class time than either using a vocabulary sheet with predefined words or allowing device usage. The tension resonates with the group, and shortly thereafter in the conversation, there are multiple, overlapping affirmations.

The tension unresolved, only 5 min later the inquiry group goes back to the question: how are students making sense of *words they haven’t been explicitly taught*? If students don’t look up the meaning of the word, how is it that they figure out the meaning? In Excerpt 5 below, Hinata and Yukiko both provide examples of how they work with students through the target language to figure out the meaning of new kanji.

Excerpt 5: Building on known kanji

Source: *Hinata Debrief/Time stamp: 00:45:30-00:47:29*

- 1 Hinata: [yeah they ask (.) for example, they don’t
 2 know this kanji↑ and then they ask the meaning of it, but I said, like “oh you
 3 know this negative, so something about negative”
 4 Beth: mm:::::::
 5 Hinata: and then this is, actually I gave them an answer right away. “this means
 6 to [use” so they (don’t [u-]
 ...
 7 Yukiko: [cause they know like the kanji
 8 for use. Yeah, they learned the kanji for use
 ... *One of the women wonders what language students use to ask questions in Hinata’s class*
 9 Yukiko: oh maybe we have to just go like uh first, we know this kanji, and we know this
 10 kanji, and just [go through it, like [okay () you end up getting authentic=

- 11 Beth: [mm:::
 12 Hinata: [ah::
 13 Yukiko: =material, you can just uh you can recognize some kanji and grammatical
 14 forms, you can go through with whole class as you say, uh:: (.) and fthen
 15 Beth: yeah, see [where they go may]be

Hinata, in lines 1–3 describes how she scaffolds student understanding by helping them make sense of context clues in the sentence, and even *within* the unknown kanji by looking at radicals. Yukiko then provides another example, again explaining that she would talk students through each of the kanji that they *did* know, in order to try to guess the meaning of the unknown kanji through context.

In sum, these excerpts show Engeström’s theory at work; moments of expansion and growth are stimulated by contradiction (2009), leading to shifts, at least in thinking, if not also in action. The content of the inquiry group’s conversations shows that they wrestled with contradictory ideas and evidence about how students make sense of new, not explicitly taught language. These ideas and evidence came not only from the recent observation of Hinata’s class, but certainly also from their wider sociocultural-historical experiences. For example, Amina’s coursework in language pedagogy and Hinata’s training in creating an IPA are evident in their comments. Put differently, observing Hinata’s class formed a productive contradiction by introducing a new and disruptive mediating means into the instructors’ existing, socioculturally-created system. The conversations that resulted from this disruption in the system show that the women tried to reconcile these contradictory ideas and evidence, leading to changed interpretations and understandings of their teaching practice.

Conversation Structure and Dynamics Microinteractional analysis revealed the salience of *how* the women engaged in conversation with each other over contradictory ideas and evidence. The *structure and dynamics* of their conversations were important mediators of the group’s ability to productively wrestle with contradictory ideas and evidence. Let’s revisit Excerpt 1 from above.

In Excerpt 1, and in particular in lines 1–36, the conversation is an active back and forth, complete with overlaps and interruptions, between Amina and Hinata. Amina, in particular, energetically pursues her question in a way that, at first reading, seems to cut off Hinata and not give her a chance to speak. Coding the excerpt for turn taking patterns,² however, shows that the overall trajectory of talk is preserved, and that Amina’s interruptions function to clarify Hinata’s meaning; thus the *interruptions are cooperative in nature*. More specifically, Hinata is giving Amina “conditional access to the turn;” that is, Hinata, sometimes in the middle of a turn of talk, yields her turn to Amina for the purpose of clarifying meaning. This is one of

²In this case, I coded for Turn Relevant Places (TRP). A TRP marks the place where it would be acceptable for a speaker change to take place. It is marked in the transcripts as |

the four categories of overlapping speech which Schegloff argued *does not need repair*. In contrast, *uncooperative* interruptions would be marked by shifts in the overall trajectory of talk that are felt as competitive; these, in Schegloff's argument, *would* need repair (Schegloff, 2000).

Notice how Amina talks past three TRPs before ceding the floor to Hinata at her TRP at the end of line 6. In line 7, Hinata anticipates the start of her turn and begins the utterance "yeah:::" but holds it until Amina completes her turn with "...anything like that?" In line 7, Hinata begins a response to Amina's question, stating that "we have (.) a vocabulary sheet..." however Amina seizes on Hinata's TRP and attempts to clarify what students do with that vocabulary sheet. In line 8 Amina says: "...so they study at home the vocabulary and then they come ready for the topic?" Here Amina seems to be testing an assumption that the students would need to memorize the vocabulary before being able to use it in the context of a class activity. Between lines 9 and 18, Hinata is able to elaborate on her explanation relatively uninterrupted; however, Amina plays an active role by adding in five "okay" continuers in lines 11, 13, 15 (2x), and 19. These continuers, as well as Amina's overlap and retaking of the floor in line 8, are primarily cooperative in nature; they function to continue the talk in the same direction the main interlocutor, Hinata, is taking it. This remains true, but takes on a different tone in line 21. Amina retakes the floor as Hinata pauses with an "um," saying: "*but I mean*, if the vocabulary in the textbook, do they know the meaning? Like, what is the meaning?" On the one hand, "but I mean" functions to redirect the conversation, ever so slightly, by implying that what Hinata is saying is *not* addressing Amina's question. On the other hand, it also functions to move the conversation as a whole to a deeper mutual understanding of different ways of teaching vocabulary; for this reason, the interruption is cooperative in the broader sense. In response to this clarifying question, Hinata states in lines 24–25 that the textbook has both English and Japanese. It is at this point, on line 26, that Amina finally seems satisfied with Hinata's response: "oh, okay, English and Japanese."

Conversations characterized by cooperative interruptions are mediating, because they facilitate the co-construction of meaning. In the prior section I concluded that the inquiry group's conversations showed that they wrestled with contradictory ideas and evidence; here I argue that *cooperative interruptions* help explain *how* they were able to productively discuss these contradictory ideas and evidence. A group of individuals cannot co-construct meaning if that group cannot maintain productive trajectories of talk; this is the case even, and especially, when there is confusion and/or disagreement. The conversation can mediate *deconstruction* of ideas, and crucially, it should, if it is to spur development and co-construction of new knowledge; however, conversational structure cannot *itself* degenerate and still be a mediating tool.

Methods of Lesson Study Perhaps the most powerful mediating means for instructor development in this study was observation of teaching, which plays a central role in lesson study. Through direct observation of one another's classes, the instructors' own training and teaching experiences came into contact with what they observed

their colleagues doing in the classroom. Observation of one's *own* teaching through videos is also a powerful mediator. Observation of others, whether direct or imagined, and observation of self through video thus had the power to deconstruct previously fixed ideas about teaching, as well as construct new ways of teaching. At the same time, observations of teaching carry the potential of providing inspiration as well. Observing Hinata's teaching not only served as a disrupting force, but also as inspiration, providing ideas for possible new ways of teaching.

One example of how observation opening up new possibilities came at the very beginning of the debrief, in a conversation primarily between Amina and Hinata about target language use in the classroom. Earlier I discussed this conversation (Excerpt 1) in light of how the structure of conversation, characterized by productive disagreement, served as a mediating means; here I revisit Excerpt 1 to examine how the teachers' observation of Hinata's lesson introduced new ideas about teaching into their conversation.

Amina opens this portion of the conversation with a clear statement of what she observed in Hinata's class: "I see the students also like using the target language and you said this is first class to teach this topic" (lines 1 and 3). Here the 'and' in line 1 functions more as a 'but,' as the illocutionary force of her statement is to put what she observed (target language use) into contrast with what Hinata said (first class of new unit). In the conversation that followed, Amina iteratively refined her question to find out whether students received English translations of vocabulary or not; Hinata responded to Amina's questions, eventually satisfying Amina with the information that, yes, students' textbooks did have English and Japanese.

What is significant here is how observing Hinata's class spurred this and other conversations in the first place. Though prior to observing Hinata's class the women had talked about the teaching and learning of vocabulary, these conversations had been theoretical in nature; observing Hinata and her students using the target language grounded the conversations in a real sense of what was possible.

4 Discussion

The transformative potential of these mediating means in this particular inquiry group can be best interpreted through the lens of Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth's (2001) distinction between a community and a pseudocommunity. In a pseudocommunity individuals "behave *as if* we all agree" (Grossman et al., 2001, p. 955). Indeed,

the maintenance of pseudocommunity pivots on the suppression of conflict. Groups regulate face-to-face interactions with the tacit understanding that it is against the rules to challenge others or press too hard for clarification. This understanding paves the way for the *illusion of consensus*. (p. 955)

In contrast, a "mature *community* is [willing] to engage in critique in order to further collective understanding" (p.980, emphasis added).

The inquiry group in this study manifested the characteristics of a more mature community, as defined by Grossman et al., through the mediating means of discussing *conflicting pedagogical concepts*. In looking at the conversational content, it's evident that the women did not shy away from pedagogical questions that genuinely challenged each other's thinking. They discussed their differences of opinion about target language use, and about implicit versus explicit vocabulary learning. Even more importantly, they brought their different perspectives on these topics to bear on the discussion in productive ways. This ability to publicly disagree afforded the women opportunities for conceptual development by bringing new evidence into conflict with existing interpretations (Horn, 2010).

In addition to the *content* of the conversations, microinteractional analysis reveals how the *structure and dynamics* of the conversations mediated the group's ability to productively wrestle with such contradictory ideas and evidence. In particular, the inquiry group's conversations were characterized by cooperative interruptions. As indicators of active, engaged conversation, cooperative interruptions stand in contrast to "an interactional congeniality ... maintained by a surface friendliness," which marks a pseudocommunity (Grossman et al., 2001, p. 955). The women in this study were comfortable critiquing ideas, introducing counterevidence, or persisting in calls for clarification. The individuals in the group pushed each other to speak in specifics rather than abstractions. Doing so in a conversational structure that was respectful, affirming and supportive allowed assumptions to be tested, differences in understanding to become apparent, and ultimately, contradictions—and opportunities for conceptual development—to bubble to the surface (Grossman et al., 2001).

Another critical mediating means for conceptual development was *direct and indirect observation of each other's teaching*. Although the prior experiences of the women influenced the ideas they brought to our group conversations, *observing* each other's teaching supported conceptual development by providing invaluable input of both confirming and contradictory evidence into the discussions. Directly observing one another afforded all members of the inquiry group "transparent access to colleagues' practices," a prerequisite to learning within a community of practice (Levine & Marcus, 2010, p. 396). Excerpt 1 is an illustrative example of this, as the observation of Hinata's use of target language encouraged Amina to inquire into Hinata's particular way of promoting vocabulary learning. In this case, direct observation of teaching practices served to disrupt thinking about teaching and contributed to the mediation of conceptual development.

The experience of being directly observed was a powerful variation of this third mediating means for Hinata. In the debrief conversation Hinata reexamined her teaching practice as she was asked to explain her rationale for certain pedagogical moves and make sense of feedback from her colleagues. Further, in her reflections on being observed, Hinata shared that the feedback she received—because it came from peers she *trusted*, was shared in a *comfortable environment*, and had the *concreteness* and *embeddedness* of a specific observation—enabled her to think deeply about her practice. Hinata's experience in the inquiry group stands in contrast to what is possible in one-shot workshops, which in their singular nature cannot

develop these types of long-term, trusting relationships. In sum, participating in direct observation (of self and others) was a productive tool for this group of women, in large part because the inquiry group was a mature community.

The present study introduced a mediating means in the form of *meta-reflection mediated by transcripts of previous group meetings*. I am not aware of any studies that have documented this particular use of transcripts. This kind of meta-reflection was shown to be a productive element to add to lesson study; reading and reflecting on transcripts of previous group meetings ('debriefs') proved to be useful mediators of conceptual development. Through reading and discussing the debrief transcript, the women were able to (re)view their own comments, "hearing" them as if they were outside parties to the conversation. DWR calls on researchers to act as "outside experts" to mirror back emergent contradictions to participants; the process of (re) viewing the transcripts served a similar function for the women. Hinata talks about how this process enabled her to gain additional insights from the initial debrief conversation than she had in the moment.

This study found that the sociocultural context, specifically the supportive environments of the women's programs, was the most salient mediating means of their conceptual development. In fact, all other mediating means in this study were predicated upon the women's membership in this sociocultural context *which afforded choice, experimentation, and innovation*. Hinata and Yukiko's work with Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) units is one of the clearest examples of this; the freedom afforded them allowed Hinata to *choose* to attend a professional development seminar about Assessment (including the IPA), and to *experiment* with using IPA units in her course. These IPA units not only transformed Hinata and Yukiko's teaching, they inspired ideas of *what was possible* within the inquiry group.

5 Conclusion

The findings of this study support the view that a combination of periodic workshops and sustained instructional inquiry groups can be particularly effective in promoting teacher conceptual development. Hinata's comment below eloquently summarizes the synergistic relationship:

So, from ... [institutional workshops] I get knowledge. For example, last year we learned [exploratory practice] and IPA and I took IPA classes ... last summer, so I got knowledge. And kinda like there I start thinking about how I can you know implement what I have learned into my own teaching. And in the small group like we have or more smaller, like smaller even smaller, with Yukiko, I kinda, those places are um like good good ones to kinda think more you know about how I can implement those like knowledge into your teaching. (Hinata's interview)

It would be tempting for me to argue that language teacher professional development should *only* take the form of small, long-term inquiry groups like the one in this study. The time that the group spent together was not only professionally fruitful, but personally rewarding. Yet this study has shown that the workshops and insti-

tutes which the women had attended were also integral to their conceptual development, because they introduced new ideas and pedagogies that the women could later explore and try out. For example, Hinata and Yukiko likely wouldn't have been experimenting with IPA units without the college-wide focus on building student language proficiency, and had they not previously attended summer institutes about assessment and content-based instruction. At the same time, though, Hinata's reflections suggest that without her partnership with Yukiko, and her involvement in the inquiry group, she might not have been able to implement the content of the summer institutes to the same extent. In sum, it was the synergistic pairing of workshops/institutes with sustained involvement in a small group of colleagues which afforded the teachers in this study a space to experiment with proficiency-based teaching in their classrooms. Thus, I would argue, in addition to *more* professional development in higher education (see Malone, this volume), we need that professional development to be respectful of and responsive to the rich variety of experiences that teachers contribute to their own learning, as well as that of their colleagues.

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