

## Collaborative learning enhances school as a learning community

IN SCHOOLS, activity theory and learning community play an important role in new pedagogical practices that promote the use of technology in education. As a learning technologist, for decades I have interestingly designed Collaborative Learning Environment (CLE) and Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) for the same purposes.

My CLE and CSCL place a strong emphasis on social activity process and using technology for learning.

The relationship of students and teachers in school, after all, are mainly facilitated by discourse and interaction via a collaborative system. If activity systems are constantly developed to suit school context, they can empower both teachers and students to create the school community and share everyday teaching and learning via computer system.

Also, it is of course vital to promote the learning community and social process activity among student-student, student-teacher and teacher-teacher that can enable the cooperative, collaborative, and interactive aspects of learning activities in school. Later, the process of using educational technology will be easier.

Last weekend, I listened to a thought-provoking lecture of Prof Manabu Sato, of Gakushuin University in Japan, organised by Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Education and Pico (Thailand) Plc.

Interestingly, he conducted similar research to mine but focused on school process, not a computer system itself. Accordingly, I would like to share and report his vision in my article this week.

To promote school reform, Prof Sato talked about how we can foster "Collaborative Learning in School as Learning Community (SLC) and Its Lesson Study". Indeed, school as a learning community is not a method but a vision.

He said: "School as a Learning community is a school where students learn together, teachers also learn together as professionals, and even parents learn together". It aims to realise the human right of learning among all the children, perform professional development among all the teachers, and prepare for democratic society in a community.

His SLC vision of activity systems consists of Collaborative learning in the classroom, Collegiality or professional learning community in the staffroom, and "Learning participation" by parents.

In 1988, he invented SLC, and started renovating schools toward being a learning community. By 2012, there were 300 pilot schools under the initiative. Now, as many as 1,500 elementary schools as well as 2,000 junior and 300 senior high schools have joined in. All are miraculously successful, according to his reports.

Prof Sato suggested that school education in the 21st century is characterised with project oriented curriculum and collaborative learning. According to his presentation, he said as follows:

1. Collaborative learning in SLC is embodied in "pair learning" in the first and the second grades in primary school, and small group activities in the other grades of primary school, middle school and high school.

2. The small group should be organised not by homogeneous members but by heterogeneous ones in gender, ability, and cultural and social background.

3. Collaborative learning has two main functions of sharing each idea and jumping by "scaffolding" with other's ideas.

4. SLC usually organises two stages of collaborative learning in a lesson, one is textbook level and another is more advanced. The advanced jumping task guarantees authenticity in collaborative learning.

In addition, SLC regards two modes of learning; the imitation of other's ideas and scaffolding with other's idea. Prof Sato recommends designing such two different tasks in each lesson, a "sharing task" of textbook level and "jumping task" beyond the textbook.

According to Lev Vygotsky, children can learn more with peers than learning alone, so in SLC of Prof Sato, the collaborative learning is a listening relationship, jumping task, and authenticity in learning practice.

In other words, the jumping task prepares for authentic learning, enhanced discourse community and ample opportunities of scaffolding for slow learners.

To create a School as a Learning Community, Prof Sato encouraged all teachers to do the lesson study in schools, which aims to (1) realise the human right of learning for all students, and high-quality learning, (2) help teachers be thoughtful and reflective building professionals in a learning



community who establish collegiality and professional autonomy and (3) democratise the school structure for all members to be protagonists.

While in normal schools, teachers focus on subject matter analysis, lesson plan and teaching skills; alternatively in SLC, Prof Sato told teachers to focus their lesson study on learning activity and its relations of students, which should be conducted frequently – more than 50 times at a school each year.

To empower a professional learning community constructed by lesson study, the purpose of lesson study in SLC is not “evaluation” nor even “advice”, but thoughtful and deliberate incidents of shared “learning” in the classroom, he said.

As a consequence, learning study in SLC is a core of lesson study – we should discuss what happened in the class, where students generate learning, and where they failed.

Yet, case discussion in SLC is not a conversation for “advice to a practitioner” but for sharing “what we learned from the case”.

In regard to Prof Sato’s speech, the focus of lesson study in SLC is not teaching but learning, in other words, not planning and evaluating teaching but design and reflection on learning. The main purpose of lesson study in SLC is to build a thoughtful and reflective learning community both in the classroom and the staffroom.

To summarise, lesson study is a process of design, practice with observation, and reflection. One must document and film the lesson study for research and do contextualised analysis afterwards. All those procedures not only create a learning community, but also can easily implement computer support collaborative learning quickly.

Let’s create collaborative learning environments and empower teachers and students in school learning communities. Happy school reform will come true!

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