A Short Model of Professional Learning Practice of Project 2: English Conversation for Beginners

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Abstract—This research is a series of major research: *A model of professional learning practice for 21st century learners, focusing on English language learning*. There are seven English development projects to be used as a tool to investigate how 21st century learners practising learning English in various courses. The projects are the followings: project1. How to write an abstract, project2. English conversation for beginners, project3. English conversation for intermediate level, project4. English conversation for advanced level, project5. Standardized test, project6. English conversation for Engineering students, and project7. Job application. The aims of this research were to investigate how 21st century learners learning to practice learning and to provide a short model of professional learning practice through an English course: English conversation for beginners. *Learners* in this project meant as follows: participants practicing learning how to reach their speaking goal at their own pace, teachers practicing learning how to enhance participants to reach their speaking goal, a researcher practicing learning how to conduct research and to facilitate both participants and teachers to reach their speaking learning and teaching goal. Twenty one participants acted as learners in this course. Fourteen officials were from the College of Industrial Technology and the rest from the Audit unit of President Department, King Mongut's university of Technology North Bangkok. There were ten hours for this course. Six hours for a Thai teacher and four hour for a foreign teacher. There are two steps in this research. Step1. action research in action (adapted from Hadley, 2003): goal-setting, focus and investigate were used to narrow the scope of research. Step2. action research procedures: plan, act, observe, reflect, revise and report were used to obtain a simple model of professional learning practice of learners in project 2. The research reported that using action research in action and action research procedures encouraged some participants to reach their speaking goal at their own pace, to increase teachers' reflection on how to help students to reach goals and to increase a researcher's confidence in doing research. A simple model of professional learning practice of project 2: English conversation for beginners was summarized and shown below.

Goal-setting→ input contents → Study contents until getting main concepts →Practice (*USL from ARP*)→Creating their learning & teaching innovation (*USL from ARP*)→Practice in individual, pairs and groups →Finding and using new secret strategies getting from ARP to change better for the next cycle.

NB. *USL from ARP* means using unique strategies of each learner getting from Action Research Procedures.
Keywords—Action research, action research in action, action research procedures, professional learning practice, teacher's roles

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I. Introduction

Because of the coming of ASEAN community in 2015, Thai government provides huge grants to universities to develop people's language ability. As a result my university was one of them to receive the grants. Therefore there are a lot of English projects created in my workplace. To have the most effective learning outcomes, doing research should be conducted. This research was a series of major research: *A model of professional learning practice for 21st century learners, focusing on English language learning*. There are seven English development projects to be used as a tool to investigate how 21st century learners practising learning English in various courses. The major contents of this course were related to self-introduction of each participant and small talk. Teaching approaches were emphasized on encouraging participants to practice learning and reflecting while participating the activities through Action Research Procedures (ARP).

II. Literature Review and Presentation

A. *Essential Theories behind the Research*

In the present time, the world has changed rapidly because we can access information from various sources very easily. However, it depends on how much we can learn how to get and use it appropriately. As a result, teaching and learning methods should be changed as well. Teaching how to learn, how to solve problems in variety of situations and providing more opportunities to practice learning are my major points in my project. The essential theories behind the research to promote learning about how to learn are action research, action research in action and action research procedures. In this project professional learning practice was also focused. Action research was used as a tool to enhance teachers' professional development (Elyildirim and Ashton, 2006:4). Action research is one of important methods to enhance our learners recognizing how they could learn. Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988) describe action research as a collaborative practice. From this view, participants, teachers and I as a researcher discussed and planned together for changing our learning better. Parsons and Brown (2002) describe the important concept of action research as *"a form of investigation designed for use by teachers to attempt to solve*

problems and improve professional practices in their own classrooms. It involves systematic observations and data collection which can be then used by the practitioner-researcher in reflection, decision-making and the development of more effective classroom strategies." Miller (2007) added that action research is a part of teaching to observe what happened in the class and tried to find reason why, when and how students become better learners. In my project, those views are very important for not only teacher, but also for participants and a researcher as learners to reflect themselves to answer why, when and how they reach their goals at their own pace. Moreover, action research procedures: plan, act, observe, reflect, revise and report, helped learners to find their solutions and strategies to keep practice better. Hadley (2003), Green, (2003) and Watson Todd (2003) used action research in action to get current information to narrow the scope of research. In my project I also use these processes to analyse the real time problems. "Professional Practice is where a student is required to extend knowledge and skills within a practical environment." Retrieved from https://askcurtin.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/380/~/what-is-professional-practice%3F

In my project, learners had expertise in various fields. For example, participants are from various departments so the aspects of their jobs are rather different. It means that the participants should learn about how to learn English. Cooperative learning is one of the main factors to create positive learning atmosphere and then affected learners' learning achievement (Songsiri 2007:39). Having learners practise learning several times could promote learners' professional development. The more the learners practice their language learning, teaching and doing research, the more their professional will improve as well. This is one of the main aspects of 21st century learners' language skills. How to learn language skills is more likely to be trend of 21st century language learning.

B. Steps of the Research

- Step 1: Action research in action

  Goal-setting:

  For participants, they planned to introduce themselves and speak in English as mush as possible.

  For teachers: they planned the contents to teach and encourage students to have more confidence in speaking such as self-introduction, small talk.

  For a researcher: I as a Thai teacher and researcher planned to observe interesting events happened in the class.

  Focus: learners (participants, teachers and a researcher) could reach their goals at their own pace.

  Investigate: How could learners reach their goals at their own pace?

- Step 2: Action research procedures

Plan. (What to do and find ways to reach the goal at own pace)

For participants, they followed the teachers' lesson plans and planned to introduce themselves. For a foreign teacher, he planned to teach small talk such as advice and recommendations because he thought it was very useful for the participants in their workplace and planned to use ESA techniques (Engage, Study and Activate) to encourage participants to learn. For a Thai teacher, I as a teacher planned to teach self introduction and easy small talk because it could help participants to introduce themselves and start communicate to their colleagues. For a researcher, I also as a researcher planned to meet and discuss with teachers in terms of caring and sharing, to provide ideas and the main concepts of expectation language outcomes, to encourage and to facilitate both participants and teachers to reach their goal at their own pace, and to observe what happened in the class.

Act and Observe (described what happened while learning and teaching in the class)

Both participants and teachers tried to follow the lesson plans, however, there were four interesting events happened in the course. **Interesting event 1:** I had all participants thought back how they could introduce themselves in front of the class by asking them what are your secrete speaking strategies to help you to speak out? **They were summarized as follows:** "My secrete speaking strategies are ….." **P1.** *"practice speaking with my friends and speak in front of the mirror,"* **P3.** *"meditate first and then start to speak again and again,"* **P4.** *"think about the major topic and then describe more details."* **P7.** *"Inhale and exhale first to make me relaxed and then write the information on the paper and practice speaking again and again.* **P8.** *Try to organize the priority topics first, next write them on the paper and then start to speak out."* **P2.** Stands up and says, *"Why don't you give me more time to rethink and to write them down on the paper immediately every time after finishing rehearsal at home so that we could improve learning speaking English through self-reflection."* At that time, I realized that how I forgot to have students do like that. Therefore I thanked for his recommendations.

Interesting event 2: After teaching two weeks (4 hours) both teachers and I found that some of participants were absent. I thought it was not a good sign to let it go so I asked participants usually absent directly why they were absent. Most of them told me that it was because of the inappropriate learning time. They would like to learn outside of working hours. **Interesting event 3:** Did not know communication strategy and steps of speaking. While teaching in the class and having participants working in groups, I as a researcher heard **Participant 1** said, *"everyone listen! I* ป่วย วันนี้ (Today I am sick) " **P2:** ที่ มีงานอะไรให้ ผมช่วยไหม? (What can I do for you?) **P3:** *"work, he.. he….จะ help you."* (He would like to help you.) **P1:** *"Oh! Thank you. I work ok!"* At that time I thought that it was not a good idea to correct them immediately so I decided to ask them, *"Are you sick today?*

What's wrong with you? Do you have a headache?" **Interesting event** 4 I asked her with smiling and encouraging her to answer. **P1**. *"Yes! Yes! I have a headache now but Ok now…. ok now…..ok….now"* (she responded without hesitation, however, she did not know how to end conversation because she repeated to say, "but ok now" three times and stop immediately without confidence). Moreover, I heard **P2**. Said, *"Would you please continue to teach us the following course. We need you to encourage us to improve my English, especially speaking English."*

Reflect and Revise (analyse the interesting events and change them for the better)

Reflect: **Interesting event 1:** simple model of learning speaking practice. I had all participants thought back how they could introduce themselves in front of the class**.** They helped together to reflect on what things helped them to speak out and the answer were various strategies. This meant that each participant had each unique strategy to help him/her to speak out. Moreover, one of participants (P2.) showed his more understanding about the advantage of self-reflection by asking a teacher to give him more tasks to reflect his speaking immediately at home. That was a good sign for his professional learning practice.

Reflect: **Interesting event 2: the inappropriate learning time** The teaching time will be changed for the next course because during this time some participants, a foreign teacher and I were inconvenient in other time. *Revise*: Therefore, I and some absentees agreed to practice speaking outside the class when we met together sometimes and some of them felt satisfied and the rest told me that they would try to join the class. Finally, we were satisfied about this solution. So the course would go on until the end.

Reflect: **Interesting event 3:** Did not know communication strategy and steps of speaking

Participants **1, 2 and 3** did not know how to help them to express ideas in English and how to end conversation because they spoke in mother language. For example, participant **1** repeated to say, "but ok now….." three times and stop immediately without confidence. *Revise:* Provide communication strategies and summarized three steps of speaking in terms of starting conversation/greetings, in the middle conversation (participants' information) and ending conversation (Providing language framework about how to sign when ending conversation. For example, that's it/ that's all/ Good bye!)

Reflect: **Interesting event** 4: Teacher's positive response

She responded a teacher without hesitation, It meant that she might have more confidence to express ideas when the teacher smiled and tried to encourage her to speak. As **P2** asked me to continue to teach the following course, it might assume that teacher's positive response could affect students' learning achievement. *Revise:* Try to create caring and sharing atmosphere.

Report (summarize the outcomes)

From cycle 1: we found that we would change better for the next course, Cycle 2, project3: English Conversation for Intermediate Level as follows:

Interesting event 1: More focusing on students' self-reflection on their language learning both in and outside the class immediately by expressing ideas through speaking and writing.

Interesting event 2: Survey participants' need and plan among participants, teachers and a researcher about appropriate time to learn next course.

Interesting event 3: Did not know communication strategy and steps of speaking. We plan to provide communication strategies and three steps of speaking to have participant more practice. (The contents for starting, in the middle and ending conversations)

Interesting event 4: Be more aware of teacher's positive responses and always think that teacher's responses affected students' language learning achievement.

III. Important Information

A. Simple models of professional learning practice

For participants: Planned how to learn, acted *(several times)* following the plan, observed *(more critical thinking)* what happened while participating both in and outside the class, reflected *(increasing awareness-raising)* what things made them learned best, revised *(changing better for the next cycle) by paying much attention on suggestions from various sources)* and then reported *(without being shy whether they reach their goals or not)* to others in front of the class. The summary of participants' learning practice model

- goal-setting → language input→ understanding contents → practice → using and finding own secret learning strategies through ARP → exchanging and sharing learning secretes to others →change better for the next practice

For teachers: planned how to enhance participant to reach their speaking goal at their own peace, acted following the plan, observed what happened while teaching in the class, reflected what made things negative or positive outcomes, revised by reading more from various sources to change better and then reported to the colleagues and the researcher.

- goal-setting (how to enhance participants to reach their goal at their own pace) → finding own secret strategies to reach the goals through ARP

For a researcher: planned how to conduct research to facilitate and help both participants and teachers reach

their goals, <u>acted</u> following the plan, <u>observed</u> what happened in the class between participants and teachers, <u>reflect</u> whether they reached they goal or not, <u>revised</u> reading more in various sources to change for better and <u>report</u> the outcomes. However, the data also reported that all of them should be trained to be familiar to these processes. The more they practiced using action research in action and action research procedures, the more they developed their professional learning as well.

- goal-setting (how to enhance both participants and teachers to reach their goal at their own pace) → finding own secret strategies to reach the goals through ARP

NB. ARP stands for Action research procedures: plan, Act, observe, reflect, revise and report.

B. Conclusion for a model of professional learning practice

In conclusion, the model of professional learning practice for the learners: participants, teachers and a researcher are divided into six steps. They are the following, first they start to set their goals to get contents and strategies to reach their goal at their own pace, second study until understanding the main concepts, third practice through action research procedures in individual, pairs and groups, fourth use and find own strategies through APR , fifth exchange and share own secret strategies to others. Finally, change learning better for the next cycle. The concepts of a model are provided below.
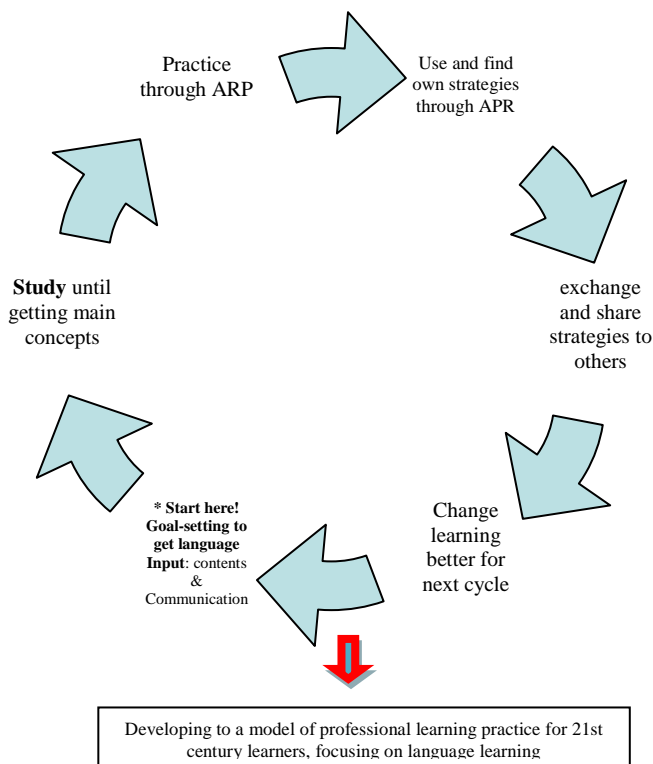

Figure 1. A short model of professional learning practice of project 1: English conversation for beginners

However, the data also reported that all learners (participants, teachers and a researcher) should be trained to be familiar to these processes. The more they practiced using action research in action to narrow the scope of research and action research procedures to investigate and reflect how they could learn better, the more they developed their professional learning as well. As the results, the process of professional learning practice, focusing on English language learning is not finished in this project. It will continue to develop to the next research: *A Simple Model of Professional Learning Practice of Project 3: English Conversation for Intermediate level.*

Acknowledgment

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