

The Forming Mechanism of Foreign language Teachers' Professional Development Community*

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Learning community is an important approach to the professional development of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities. Based on the concept of professional development community, this paper analyzes the common connotation and classification of foreign language teachers' professional development community, and constructs the model and forming mechanism of foreign language teachers' professional development community, aiming at providing enlightenment and reference for the professional development of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities.

Keywords: learning community, foreign language teachers, mechanism

Introduction

Many scholars have realized the importance of the learning community, and done some research on the teacher learning community from the macro, meso, and micro levels. At present, the researches at home and abroad are mostly carried out from the micro level, analyzing the learning community from the perspectives of knowledge management, behavioral role, culture teaching, interactive discourse, and so on. Most of the researches focus on specific teacher professional development activities, such as literature reading, collective lesson preparation, and scientific research practice, but there are few studies on the forming mechanism of foreign language teachers' development community from the perspectives of synergetic innovation theory and self-organization theory.

Connotation and Classification of the Professional Development Community

Teachers' learning community is a learning organization, including the members of teachers and their peers or experts, with an aim to improve the teachers' teaching and academic level. It has the common characteristics of learning community: voluntary participation, information sharing, mutual trust and interaction, and reflective learning. At the time being, most of the teachers' learning communities are organized by schools and other teaching and academic institutions, with collective preparation of lessons or lectures as the basic form of activities, in which teachers are passive and lack of enthusiasm and initiative to participate. With the development of educational technology, the connotation of teachers' learning community has been expanded and a network

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learning community occurs. A bottom-up approach is adopted in a network learning community, in which there is less administrative intervention, so that the enthusiasm of teachers can be effectively brought into play.

Lieberman (2000) pointed out that the network provided a new way for teachers' development, and a network learning community provided the future direction for teachers' development. The openness, interactivity, and ubiquitous nature of the network provide convenient conditions for teachers to exchange, interact, and share resources with their peers and the experts, and to enlighten their wisdom with the help of social network media.

Scholars have given different definitions to the teachers' network community from different perspectives, such as from the perspectives of teachers' professional development, teaching, and teachers' learning community. For foreign language teachers in colleges and universities, the network learning community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities is to make teachers interact with their peers or the experts by participating in various learning activities with the help of network social media for the common development goal of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities. It is a virtual learning organization that continuously optimizes the teachers' knowledge structure, improves their teaching and academic practice, and strengthens their professional identity and sense of belonging.

From the structural perspective, learning communities can be divided into three categories: task-based learning communities, practice-based learning communities, and knowledge-based learning communities (Reil & Polin, 2004). According to the different goals, the teachers' learning community can also be divided into two categories: teachers' learning community for teaching and teachers' learning community for scientific research (Dai, 2013). There are many concrete forms of teachers' learning community, such as school-based teachers' learning community and cross-school teachers' learning community. However, no matter in what form the teachers' learning community is, teacher development is the fundamental nature of it. Qi and Wang (2018) states that there are mainly two kinds of network teachers' learning communities: Teachers' academic community and teachers' teaching community, but as far as foreign language teachers in colleges and universities are concerned, teaching and scientific research are mutually compatible. No matter what kind of learning communities the teachers join, their ultimate aim is to achieve their own sustainable development.

Synergetic innovation theory and self-organization theory provide a new perspective for the study of network learning community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities, and are of great significance in revealing the forming mechanism of teachers' learning communities.

The Framework and Characteristics of the Professional Development Community

The framework was constructed according to self-organization theory and synergetic innovation theory, and the major characteristics of foreign language teachers' professional development community are complexity, self-organization evolution, and openness.

The Framework of the Study

Self-organization theory. According to the theory of self-organization, the formation and evolution of self-organization system should have at least the common characteristics, such as self-identity, self-control, self-adaptation, and self-development. It is assumed that a network learning community already has the above basic characteristics of self-organization (He & Liu, 2013; Yuan, 2010).

Synergetic innovation theory. According to the theory of synergetics, synergy refers to the process of forming an orderly and unified whole through the interaction between various subsystems or elements in the system. The purpose of synergetics is to reveal the internal mechanism and mechanism of the evolution from disorder to order through the coordination of content and the exchange with the outside through the open system, which is in an imbalanced state. As a complete innovation ecosystem, social relevant departments, functional management departments, teaching teams, scientific research teams, students' teams, and the surrounding environment in the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities create synergies and the realization of synergetic innovation originates from the effective allocation and integration of various resources in synergy.

Chesbrough (2003) proposed open innovation, which marks the development of innovation theory. Since then, scholars have begun to study innovation system from the perspective of ecology, with innovation ecosystem as the research paradigm. Synergetic innovation is achieved by some people who are self-motivated and have the shared vision by forming network groups, with the aid of network information media to realize their common goal. The professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities has freed from the restrictions of disciplines, departments, and regions, and made the sharing of resources come true.

Synergetic innovation environment. From the perspective of synergetic innovation, the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities is not only the collection of innovative subjects, but also the creation of innovative atmosphere and the cultivation of innovative culture. Ecology and openness determine the formation of the internal environment of the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities, but the operation of the community is inextricably linked with the complex and changeable foreign language world.

Internal environment. The elements of the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities do not exist in isolation, but depend on a certain internal environment, which mainly includes the environments of culture and institution. And the cultural atmosphere of advocating the spirit of innovation, encouraging innovation and trust provides sources for the community to produce sustainable incentive effect.

Foreign language teachers in colleges and universities have a lot of tacit knowledge. This tacit knowledge can be transferred through consultation and communication with outside organizations and groups with the establishment of network learning community. The tacit knowledge explicitation enables the resources to be shared and disseminated within the system, which provides conditions for the teachers' innovation.

Characteristics of Foreign Language Teachers' Professional Development Community

Complexity. In the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities, the diversity of innovation subjects also indicates the complexity of the system. Each subsystem forms a value-added innovation chain through the nodes of knowledge, talents, and capital. Different nodes have different configurations of innovation, and the uncertainty of innovation in each subsystem makes the innovation activities complex.

Self-organization evolution. The professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities is a systematic innovation system. The evolutionary motive force of this system comes

from the inner part of the system, and it is the structure of the interaction and communication among the subsystems in the system. The evolution of this system is orderly. It is not a simple superposition of many innovative activities, but the whole that "is greater than the sum of the parts." In the process of continuous negotiation and sharing, the innovation resources are allocated to achieve the process from quantitative change to qualitative change.

Openness. According to the related theories of synergetics and ecology, the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities is an open ecosystem. This openness determines that the community system is not closed and it has the exchange of energy and matter with the outside world. The exchange of matter and energy between the elements within the system and between the elements inside and outside the system is the basis of the self-organization of the community. First of all, the network media of the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities is open. More importantly, the consultation and communication among the subjects of the community have promoted the continuous contact between the elements within the community and the continuous exchange of information and sharing of resources between the elements and the external environment with the virtual world and the real world. This is an open process to realize knowledge innovation. The admittance mechanism of the community of foreign language teachers' professional development in colleges and universities also endows them with enough openness.

The Forming Mechanism of the Professional Development Community

The forming mechanism of foreign language teachers' professional development community in this study includes the innovative mechanism and the operating mechanism.

The Innovative Mechanism of the Community

The innovative mechanism of the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities is manifested as the synergy among the subsystems formed by the subjects, which is spontaneous and based on a shared vision and development goal. Through interactive communication and resource sharing, the subjects of the system can achieve a synergy effect, so as to realize the optimal allocation of resources and the improvement of innovation ability.

Innovative ecological symbiosis. According to the theory of systematics and ecology, the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities is an innovation ecosystem composed of many subjects, and it is a complex value-added network. Each subsystem is an innovation node. These nodes are connected into innovation symbiotic chain, which promotes the communication, consultation, cooperation, and synergy of each subsystem, and strengthens the symbiosis and innovation ability of each subject.

Trust contract mechanism. The innovation subjects of each node within the community must be based on mutual trust in order to achieve communication, consultation, cooperation, and synergy. The trust mechanism is helpful to the cooperation among the innovation subjects and teachers' tacit knowledge explicitation, so as to realize the rational allocation of resources and the long-term maintenance of innovation ability. The resource sharing, synergy, and innovation goal can be realized only when the trust relationship is established among the subjects.

A shared vision. The shared vision of the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities is the goal that every member of the community sincerely yearns for and sincerely strives for. Based on the personal vision, the shared vision is gradually formed and developed through interactive exchanges. And the shared vision is a long-term, stable interest attraction to each subject and defines the direction of each subject's behavior, making it possible to maintain long-term synergy among the various subjects.

Innovative atmosphere. The creation of the innovative atmosphere of the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities is reflected in the cultivation of innovative culture. The shared vision and goal make the synergy among the various subjects to be maintained for a long time and become a community of interest. It is beneficial to the cooperation and complementarity among the subjects. The complexity and differences within and among subjects are kinds of creative resources. These individuals and subjects interact with each other, accelerate the sharing and dissemination of knowledge and resources, and finally form the innovative atmosphere of the system as a whole.

The Operating Mechanism of the Community

The operating mechanism of the community refers to the process of communication, consultation, cooperation, and synergy of the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities, which is the mechanism of interaction among the innovative subjects.

Interactive mechanisms. The community is composed of a variety of innovative subjects, which are social relevant departments, students' teams, functional management departments, teaching teams, and scientific research teams. The interaction between the subjects must be carried out at the emotional and cognitive level (Avalos, 2011; Wen & Ren, 2011). Emotional interaction refers to the sense of equality, security, and satisfaction based on the cognitive interaction of equality, mutual trust, assistance, and benefit among the members of the subjects (Wen, 2017). Cognitive interaction refers to the construction of foreign language teachers' professional knowledge and innovative ability through communication, consultation, cooperation, and synergy. Cognitive interaction is the basic practice of professional community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities and the quality of cognitive interaction is controlled by the effectiveness of emotional interaction.

Task allocation mechanism. The construction of the professional community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities also requires the establishment of a scientific distribution mechanism for collaborative and innovative tasks (Liu & Zhou, 2015).

In the process of the community building, the cooperation among the subjects is paid special attention, too. Teaching team and research team work together, exchange teaching approaches and teaching ideas; teaching team members learn from each other, complement each other to form a team cohesion; students and teachers form a project team to achieve their common growth. The function management department participates in the community and plays the coordination appraisal function; the social correlation department guides the students' career plan, discusses the academic and other related questions, and provides the instruction for the higher level scientific research project. In this process, teachers can not only improve their teaching cognitive level, but also consciously explore the best combination of teaching and social practice.

Comprehensive and profound sharing mechanism. Sharing not only includes the sharing of “common use”, and their own stories and experiences on the basis of participating in each other’s life course are also included. In this way, can the individual form a community on the basis of spiritual connection (Huang, 2018). Participants are interest community, and sharing is an important mechanism for the forming and maintenance of the professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities. Community sharing not only refers to the co-existence of space-time fantasy, the sharing of resources, but also sharing of life experiences. Common participation and common growth have created the attachment between the subjects of the community, which enables the subjects to overcome the tangible and intangible obstacles, the sharing mechanism to be rebuilt, and the groups’ and individuals’ development to be guaranteed.

Supervision and evaluation system. The supervision mechanism is to ensure the normal operation of the community. If there is no supervision mechanism, the interaction activities among the subjects of the community will be very relaxed and loose. Therefore, the supervision mechanism mainly includes the formulation and implementation of the system, the regulation of the subjects’ behaviors and the entire operation process, and the construction of a two-way communication mechanism for the various elements, to provide technical support for the cooperation between the subjects.

At the same time, each foreign language teacher should have a good understanding of their own learning requirements and goals, submit their reflective journal, learn about their own advantages and weaknesses, and know where they want to go. At the same time, the community should have an evaluation mechanism to ensure that the members of relevant social departments are experts and leading figures, can really bring new knowledge to foreign language teachers in colleges and universities, and conduct strategic guidance (Bao, 2017). The staff of school functional departments should participate in the activities of the community, do a good job in summing up and evaluating, pay attention to the spiritual growth of teachers, and bring the ethics of teachers’ morality, innovative practical activities together, which are incorporated into the system of teachers’ evaluation, promptly encourage outstanding subjects and individuals, hold meetings of leading groups, and seek solutions to the existing problems.

Conclusion

From the perspectives of synergetic innovation theory and self-organization theory, the development of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities should break away from the single development model and construct a multi-subject cooperative professional development community, which includes the synergy among various subjects and the synergy among the members in the subjects as well. The professional development community of foreign language teachers in colleges and universities itself is an ecological system, in which all the elements and members interact and develop harmoniously, forming an orderly development system with the same goal, reasonable structure and mutual support, and finally, the cooperative sustainable development of teachers and subjects can be realized.

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