

## *Introducing EFL faculty to online instructional conversations*

CARLA MESKILL

*Department of Educational Theory and Practice, University at Albany,  
State University of New York, Albany, NY 12222  
(email: cmeskill@uamail.albany.edu)*

GULNARA SADYKOVA

*Department of Educational Theory and Practice, University at Albany,  
State University of New York, Albany, NY 12222  
(email: gsadykova@yahoo.com)*

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### **Abstract**

This article describes the anatomy and dynamics of an online professional development activity, the 'Moodle fishbowl'. The 'fishbowl' was designed as an opportunity for experienced EFL educators to witness and make sense of instructional conversation strategies that they might themselves use as they migrate their EFL courses to blended and eventually fully online venues, venues where the roles and dynamics of interaction are decidedly different than those in the live classroom. A major emphasis in this professional development sequence was to raise faculty awareness of the unique affordances on which they, as experienced language educators, might capitalize through observation of authentic examples of responsive online instructional strategies. To that end, three-week-long collaborations were established between participating faculty's EFL students and a 'cultural expert' in the US. The cultural experts were doctoral students in language technology who employed instructional conversation strategies with the EFL students as part of informal, authentic asynchronous threaded discourse topics. The role of the faculty in training was to observe these conversations by looking into the metaphorical fishbowl, reflect on the anatomy and impact of these online instructional conversations, and report back to the group as a whole. The following narrates the rationale, processes and outcomes of this 'Moodle fishbowl' professional development sequence and suggests future considerations in supporting language educators as they move some or all of their instruction online.

Keywords: Teaching languages online, sociocultural perspective, language teacher professional development, online instructional conversations, learner-centered online language teaching.

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### **1 Introduction**

How the professional development of practicing educators can best support conceptual and dispositional change has long presented any number of challenges (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Pajares, 1992). Introducing new ways of thinking about teaching practices to experienced educators is yet another (Kubanyiova, 2006; National Research Council, 2007). However, as language educators turn to online venues in their

teaching, unique opportunities arise for language educator professional development in this regard. Chief among these opportunities is access to live and archived online language teaching models of instructional processes. Whereas access to teaching models was until recently limited to face to face (f2f) observations, videotaped classes and transcriptions of classroom interaction, language educator professional development can now employ online threaded discussions between exemplary language educators and their students as instructional models for language faculty in training. Such exemplary models, like those of traditional classrooms, are those that make optimal use of the affordances of the given instructional environment. In the case of online asynchronous language coursework, exemplary teaching sequences can be examined as both representing effective teaching overall and effective teaching given the specific affordances of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC). As such, online instructional conversations between language educators and students can serve as powerful tools for educators in training to conceptualize effective online instructional processes as well as effective instructional processes overall.

This article describes such processes and their outcomes for a group of Eastern European EFL faculty who participated in a year-long online professional development course called Teaching English Well Online. As part of the professional development sequence, they observed their own EFL students conversing online with language/culture partners in the US. The faculty in training were thereby able to directly observe, problematize and discuss in depth the kinds of learner-centered instructional conversations that they were engaged in learning about as part of their professional development.

## **2 Approach/Assumptions**

### ***2.1 Language teaching and learning***

It is widely accepted that learning a new language prospers from active, purposeful interaction with others (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). These others must be willing to engage in effortful interaction with the goal of mutual meaning generation and comprehension. These others can be teachers, fellow learners or others in the community who are willing to interact in the target language for real purposes (Ellis, 1994), and who scaffold the developing discourse of the non-native speaker (Goldenberg, 2008).

In curricular terms, language itself is no longer viewed as a set of static competencies based on the ideal native speaker model (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008). Instead, language knowledge is complexly dynamic and contextually shaped (Hall, Cheng & Carlson, 2006). This kind of active, learner-centered, talk in action approach is central to the design and processes of both 1) the ‘Moodle fishbowl’ professional development sequence; and 2) the orchestration of the EFL interactions with US collaborators “inside” the metaphorical fishbowl. Anchored in this socio-culturally influenced perspective on language education, the goal in the design and analysis of this professional development sequence is to build awareness of and fluency in the kinds of instructional guidance and responsive assistance that maximize learner-centered opportunities for their generative language use.

## 2.2 Teaching languages online

In traditional f2f classrooms, good language teachers gently restructure student output often by sensitively rephrasing what learners say. In traditional language classrooms this ‘classroom repair’ is a central task of teaching (Macbeth, 2004). It is a central component in the organizational structure of language classroom processes (Seedhouse, 2004). What distinguishes clear cut ‘repair’ (*no, try again* in its various forms) from ‘instructional conversation’ is the meaning-centered authenticity of the conversational stream during which instructional adjustments to student output occur. “To be successful instruction, the conversation involves several kinds of understandings: understanding the aims and purposes of the learning, understanding the learner(s), understanding the factors that constrain the conversation, understanding the importance of being open to multiple contingencies in the conversation, understanding what language would best bring about learner comprehension and action, and the like” (Meskill & Anthony, 2010: 16). Based on these understandings, the instructor may employ a variety of moves within *instructional conversations* (Tharp, 1993). In the language classroom, this could be *calling attention to form* when a teacher points out forms that a learner needs to be using (Student: He goes **on** school. Teacher: What school does he go **to**? Student: He goes **to** high school.) or *corralling* when an instructor redirects learners’ attention to specifics of language used (Student: Last Sunday I **go** to a party. Teacher: Last Sunday you...? **Did** what? Student: I **went** to a party). In online teaching fora, there are unique affordances of the online environment in this regard (see Appendix A for the list of affordances emphasized throughout the professional development sequences). In short, in CMC environments attention can be drawn to specific language mechanics without sacrificing the generative meaning-making that might otherwise get derailed, something which is often the case in traditional f2f classrooms.

Taking advantage of such opportunities and resources to engage learners in using the target language productively while calling attention to adjustments that need to be made to their output is the essence of online instructional conversation (IC) for learning additional languages (Meskill & Anthony, 2010). Unlike traditional f2f classrooms where the teacher continually narrows and anchors focus, and thus limits the opportunities and choices with those opportunities for learners, in asynchronous online environments, environments whose hallmark is infinite choice and individual control over what happens on a screen (what Schull calls “the zone of certainty” (Schull, 2008: 168)), employing ICs to orchestrate tasks is all the more challenging. However, due to the unique communicative affordances of asynchronous online communication, there exists exceptional potential for merging authentic communication with instruction (see Meskill & Anthony, 2007, 2010).

## 2.3 The ‘Moodle fishbowl’ activity

The ‘fishbowl’ technique is a widely employed instructional format used to promote collaboration, critical observation, and conceptual development (Badger, 2007; Miller, Benz, & Wysocki, 2002). In live contexts, participants sit in concentric circles

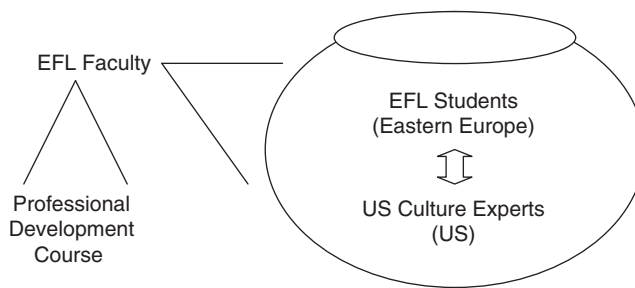


Fig. 1. 'Moodle fishbowl' format

with the outermost circle observing and discussing the human processes occurring in the inside circle. Thus a unique window on human activity is available for joint inspection. In educator professional development, the technique is frequently used as a means to stimulate careful observation of human interaction and collaborative reflection. We employed this technique in a Moodle environment in much the same way. The EFL faculty were positioned outside of the metaphorical fishbowl observing their students practicing their English communication skills with their US partners. The faculty then discussed their observations within the professional development course (Figure 1).

One of the largest hurdles for language educators as they move online is conceptualizing their professional role. Because online language learning experiences can best be learner-centered, generative and in some ways anarchic (Dooly, in press) this conceptual shift becomes doubly challenging. The rationale for the 'fishbowl' approach was that faculty could best make progress towards this understanding and acceptance if provided the opportunity to *see* their EFL students learning in well orchestrated, conversationally rich online activities while reflecting on and discussing these interactions with their peers. Indeed, having teachers observe and reflect on the use of well constructed instructional conversations by others has been shown to be an effective professional development technique (Roskos, Boehlen & Walker, 2000; Saunders, Goldenberg & Hamann, 1992).

This project's 'Moodle fishbowl' was an activity in which participating EFL professionals engaged as part of their year-long online professional development course in online teaching. Earlier in the year, they had explored online digital learning objects and their applications with their classes, developed and implemented online exercises and activities for their students that employed digital learning objects, and read and discussed the overall topic of teaching and learning language online. A good deal of the online discussion involved inviting and responding to invitations to provide peer feedback in the form of professional discussion as a generative form of professional development (Barab, MaKinster & Sheckler, 2004). For each activity there was a reflective component and for the overall course a pre and post reflection writing piece as well as ongoing participation in asynchronous discussions between and among faculty and their course instructors in Moodle. The culminating product was an electronic portfolio of their work that became part of a shared library for all participants.

The following desiderata for the faculty steered design and development of the ‘Moodle fishbowl’ activity:

- Recognize the anatomy of speech events that represent teachable moments online (Meskill & Anthony, 2010).
- Utilize the living language curricular approach (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008).
- Develop a ‘mediating toolchest’ of online IC strategies (Meskill & Anthony, 2010).
- Use verbal and non-verbal (visual online) strategies for amplifying ICs (Hilliker-VanStrander, 2007).
- Understand how IC strategies provide anchor/focus for teacher noticing and acting on teachable moments (Saunders *et al.*, 1992).

The overarching conceptual framework for the activity was constructed via Allwright’s “practice framework” for professional development whereby teachers are guided to gather data on their own work as part of their regular formative teaching practices, keep tabs on what learners in their classrooms know, and to what current pedagogical perspectives they are adhering (Tarone & Allwright, 2005). Additionally, Lave and Wenger’s notion of situated learning, whereby one observes experts at work for gradual participation and mastery, factored into the activity design (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In sum, the aim of the ‘Moodle fishbowl’ professional development sequence was to promote faculty seeing, observing and reflecting on alternative teaching and teachers, an approach central to teacher education generally (Moreno & Ortegano-Layne, 2007), and language teacher education in particular (Fanslow, 1987; Johnson, 1994; Meskill, 2009).

### 3 Context

The six participants in the online professional development course, Teaching English Well Online (TEWO), were English language faculty at an Eastern European university. The university, like many around the globe, has been working to move courses online and into blended formats and has sought collaborations with US universities to do so. The university administration encouraged participating faculty to complete the year-long professional development sequence and provided the on-site instructional technology support and textbooks needed. Participants’ years of experience ranged from two to sixteen years, with two of the six having had at least one year of online language teaching experience with an off-the-shelf EFL curriculum and supporting website whereby teachers can grade student work. These two faculty also had their EFL students engage in some optional expansion activities around the set curriculum via Moodle discussion threads. The remaining four had had no prior online teaching experience. One of the participants discontinued participating in the professional development course at the end of the fall semester due to family circumstances.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the primary focus of these online conversations is authentic meaning making, in this case sharing information about national holidays, with simultaneous contingencies for assisting learning (ICs). The faculty role was to observe these conversations, assign their individually determined grade weights and extend assignments for their students as part of the regular f2f class. In preparation,

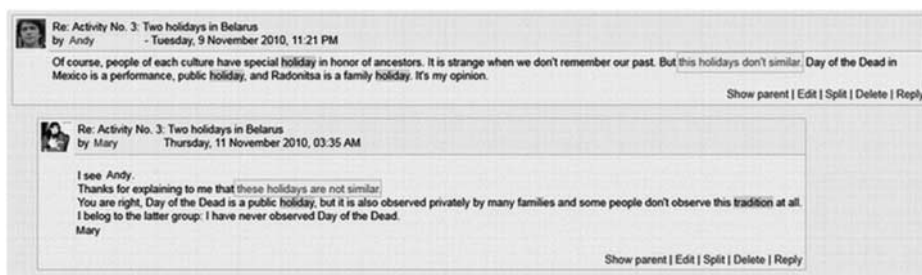


Fig. 2. Sample of inside the 'fishbowl'

each faculty participant worked with their assigned US collaborator to determine conversation topics, logistics, etc. The TEWO instructors (the authors) provided broad themes (US-Eastern European culture, hobbies, etc) as a guide to these EFL student-US collaborator discussions. As part of the TEWO professional development course, faculty were instructed to observe this talk in action, participate in an ongoing discussion about it, and to compose a prompted reflection on their experience (Appendix C).

#### 4 The 'fishbowl': observations

The guiding questions that steered our formative observation and participant probing prior to, during and on completion of the year-long professional development course were the following:

- What were instructors' thoughts and reactions to proactive guidance and responsive assistance (instructional conversations) in online EFL instruction?
- Did these reveal shifts in stance and perception regarding their teaching?

Our strategy for addressing these questions consisted of mapping out events in the professional development course that signaled progression towards better understanding and more acceptance of online language teaching (Borg, 2003). The final dataset was comprised of extensive archives of participant assignments, discussions, reflections, a live recorded focus group and f2f interviews. The researchers identified salient events within the dataset that addressed the professional development desiderata for the 'fishbowl' activity.

Archives of all professional development activity were collected over the academic year period of the project. Over the course of the project, iterative analysis based on discussions of comparisons of interpretations led to development of ongoing interview questions for faculty participants concerning the anatomy of online instructional conversations for language education. An on-site participant focus group and individual live interviews were employed in confirming and refining interpretations of participants' reported experiences.

As an instructional strategy, alignments with the course activity desiderata were employed as touchstones on both a formative and summative basis. For example, the desiderata that faculty recognize teachable moments for language learners and that language be authentic were used to coach the US culture experts to detect and

respond with highlighting and other visual techniques to teachable moments in their naturalistically evolving discussion threads with the EFL learners. At the same time, the professional development instructors pointed out teachable moments and the US conversation partners' responses to them, along with the authenticity of their learners' communication both during and following the collaborations. Likewise, faculty were encouraged to make note of the US culture experts' instructional conversation techniques, both verbal and non-verbal, as part of their own individual toolchest of online instructional strategies. Finally, as part of their final professional development course reflection, faculty were guided to articulate the role of instructional conversation strategies in online language teaching.

As we were particularly interested in the participating faculty's conceptual shifts in light of their 'fishbowl' experiences, we employed four lenses for observation and reflection in examining the course data. The four lenses are loosely adapted for language educator professional development from Weimer's (2002) key shifts in instructional practice toward learner-centered teaching. These are 1) class dynamics (balance of power between students and instructor); 2) the source of topics/content (the curriculum); 3) role of the teacher; and 4) purposes and processes of evaluation. The four concerns were central to the professional development design and processes and will be discussed in turn, integrating the faculty comments to reveal where there is evidence of shifts in thinking.

#### 4.1 Class dynamics

Q2

Inside of the 'Moodle fishbowl', the nature of the US-led online EFL collaborations was learner-centered, generative instruction. Such learner-centered, generative instruction for language education rests largely on instructors' positioning in terms of control: control of time, turns, topic, voice, and, in short, learning. In learner-centered environments, the position of learners shifts to one of controlling these elements, with the instructor becoming more of a guide than a task master. Closely paralleling Dörnyei's "authority type" as a critical factor in the language classroom environment (Dörnyei, 1994), we tracked participant pre-'fishbowl' and post-'fishbowl' thinking regarding the dynamic between themselves and their EFL learners.

As online teacher educators, we were interested in understanding how participants viewed power relationships in the f2f classes and how this aligned with the power relationships they observed in the 'Moodle fishbowl' activity. At the start of the year-long professional development course, we asked that faculty respond to a questionnaire designed to elicit such views (see Appendix B). We employed a comment-starter completion assignment with which participants recorded their post-'fishbowl' observations and reflections (see Appendix C).

Table 1 illustrates individual participants' pre/post 'fishbowl' activity thoughts on class power dynamics in the f2f classroom and, subsequently, in the online 'fishbowl' collaborations. Faculty1, an older traditional classroom teacher, initially expressed fear about online language teaching chiefly in terms of losing control of students. In both her questionnaire responses and in class discussion, she was unsure about how learners could be continually watched and held accountable, something that was revealed to be clearly central to her classroom teaching. Her 'fishbowl' observations

Table 1 *Data matrix of faculty stances: class dynamics*

PARTICIPANT	PRE-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE	POST-FISHBOWL REFLECTION
Faculty1	In our f2f classrooms it is easier to capture and hold attention. Without the f2f pressure, it is easy for online learners to drift away, give up.  Our students find groupwork unappealing and stressful.	Teacher's role [control] does not diminish in online instruction... to insure successful learning the teacher must model and scaffold the strategies for students as they are taught and implemented.  Online, there is a high level of participation without undue domination by the teacher.  X managed to engage even shy students into active work.
Faculty2	...students should agree on the primary aim. Once we have negotiated the aim the teacher needs to think about the strategies.	The online atmosphere gives students a sense of ownership. They appreciated that X did not limit them to the choice of topics and length of messages. Online changes the power distribution. Students don't get cut up by the teacher.
Faculty3	I was concerned about my students' participation.	The teacher uses the instructional conversation to listen carefully to students to guide the conversation to include students' opinions and judgments, make sure all are involved in the conversation. [my partner] skillfully uses different pictures, videos, links, etc. Great!  Students feel they own the conversation. Shy students are relaxed and self-confident and perform better than in the f2f class.
Faculty4	When students do more online there is more time for speaking activities in the f2f class.	Personalization and installing the rapport.  ICs allow me to teach while keeping students motivated.
Faculty5	If you love the job you are doing, you never stop teaching.	It was quite surprising to see how active and "talkative" our students turned out to be.

reveal recognition that the power dynamic between students and teacher can indeed shift to some pedagogical advantage in online venues. Faculty2 likewise observed that online language teaching "changes the power distribution" and Faculty3, like



Faculty1, started out concerned about loss of control online: “I was concerned about my students’ participation”, then, post-‘fishbowl’, observed advantages in relinquishing control so that learners can “own the conversation”.

While initially viewing online venues as opportunities for students to drill independently and hand in work to be graded – in short, language technologies as tools and task masters – Faculty4, one of two instructors who had used off-the-shelf online curricula, observed via the ‘fishbowl’ that online venues were indeed opportunities for “personalization and installing the rapport” as well as being a place “to teach while keeping students motivated”. Faculty5, the youngest of the participants and one who had previous online teaching experience identical to Faculty4, observed that online venues could become places where students could be very active and “talkative” as opposed to merely working through pre-fabricated materials online.

In sum, participants used the ‘fishbowl’ as a means to witness different forms of power relations/class dynamics. They were able to observe and consider more active, agentive roles on the part of their EFL students.

#### ***4.2 Source of topics/content***

In determining the content of EFL instruction, learner-centered, generative instruction capitalizes on learner interests and experiences rather than set content delineated in language textbooks. Indeed, a generative approach to language content honors ideas and their nuances as these evolve conversationally, with learners serving as sources of content and ideas about content. The affordances of asynchronous online venues neatly support this approach to content.

Our interest in faculty thinking regarding the content of EFL courses includes focus on the inclusion/exclusion of learner-generated topics and content, an affordance of asynchronous online teaching that was foregrounded in the ‘fishbowl’ professional development activity. In reviewing faculty questionnaire responses and discussion posts it appeared that much, if not all, of the EFL curriculum was textbook-based, including the off-the-shelf online EFL course. Through observation of their own students actively generating and steering topics and ideas during the ‘fishbowl’ activity, faculty commented on the pedagogical value of authentic, learner-generated communicative activity. Moreover, as noted in Table 2, faculty noted how their students made extensive use of linked and/or embedded images, recorded audio files of their own making in English, and video, as means of amplifying their meaning making in English. Faculty marveled at the amount of new information they learned about their students as well as the quantity and quality of their posts in English. Seeing what one’s students know and are capable of – Dozier, Johnston and Rogers’ “roaming the known” – is indeed a powerful and viable form of professional development (Dozier, Johnston & Rogers, 2006: 34). The faculty also learned how important it is to select discussion topics that are stimulating and relevant to students. A stunning example of this emerged during the collaborations when, in contrast to discussions of daily culture and individual interests and hobbies which generated rich and extended talk, the topic “Social involvement and responsibility” generated zero student comments even though the US collaborator attempted to initiate the discussion several times.

Table 2 *Data matrix of faculty stances: source of topics/content*

PARTICIPANT	PRE-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE	POST-FISHBOWL REFLECTION
Faculty1	The lessons (course book)	ICs include elements that can be both instructional and conversational as part of motivated, extended discussions. I never thought it is possible to touch on so many topics in such a short time in both entertaining and educative way. I learned a lot about the students myself: hobbies, interests, their families, even love stories.
Faculty2	Once my students said that [Web 2.0] tools created an atmosphere of real English. These tools prompt students to be more active and inundate them with authentic material. I was skeptical about teaching languages online.	Don't you think ICs are more important in online learning because you can't see facial expressions or hear tone of voice and you can't give immediate feedback? X tailored materials to the students' interests. He overloaded students with new language.
Faculty3	I think to achieve language learning objectives it's necessary to do great preparatory work: to select materials, to plan and to give good instructions.	Teaching in written asynchronous environments gives affordances such as richness of authentic materials, what interests their students. X used photos, maps and other links as part of conversation.
Faculty4	Online and off, I always call my students' attention to forms, lexis, ask them to find synonyms. I can do it explicitly or implicitly.	We teach languages and students learn them due to their engagement in new situations and new cultural contexts.
Faculty5	Compulsory EFL syllabus. Reading to explore new domains.	Topics for discussion should be interesting and relevant for students. We can increase students' motivation to write and be active in discussions only when the topic is interesting for them.

### 4.3 *Role of teacher*

Where traditional f2f classroom practices see teachers as the central impetus for all processes, learner-centered, generative instruction sees learners at the center of learning with teachers as guides and mentors of the learning. This shift represents a large conceptual hurdle that involves identity and affect on the part of both instructors and learners (Tarone & Allwright, 2005; Walsh, 2002). The risks associated with giving up control both as the focal point of instructional activity and in

terms of moving to a new instructional environment with which younger learners may be more competent than oneself present challenges for professional development in online teaching (Felix, 2003).

*I remember the very first seminar where we learned that we were digital immigrants and our students are natives! Now is very different. (Faculty4)*

Moreover, as noted in Table 3, the shift to an online asynchronous environment apparently does not come easily to those accustomed to controlling the classroom. This may be even more so the case for East Europeans. The participating faculty were Belarusian as were the majority of their students. Belarus is a culture that scores high in power distance, which implies that it generally accepts a hierarchical (vertical) relationship between a teacher and a student (Hofstede, 1986). In such cultures a teacher does not generally share control of the classroom with students. It did not come as a surprise then that a good teacher might be described as the one who:

*“plans and prepares lessons, selects materials and activities, organizes the work of students and facilitates it” (Faculty3)*

The professional development course enabled the faculty to re-examine their role and explore ways of being a student’s “partner” and “helper rather than a master” (Faculty1). Faculty were able to see that their students might take more active roles in the classroom. Notably, course participants expressed surprise at how outspoken their quiet students were in CMC and, consequently, how much they were able to learn about their lives. Such observations confirm the current distance education literature that underscores the interactive and personal aspects of online learning (Dringus, 1999; King, 2002), aspects that have been echoed strongly in research specific to language education (Hauck & Hampel, 2008; Meskill & Anthony, 2007).

#### **4.4 Purposes and processes of evaluation**

Evaluating language learning can be viewed as a summative endeavor: administering tests that cover some or all course curricula – or formative: the ongoing assessment of learners’ language development in progress. While traditional language teachers do both, online venues afford opportunities to undertake the latter more systematically, more instructionally, and more conversationally. Instructional conversation strategies that illustrate formative evaluation techniques were used extensively throughout the ‘fishbowl’ collaborations.

As indicated in Table 4, it is clear from the faculty participants’ initial statements regarding the purposes and processes of evaluation that, along with the risk of losing control, they were also considerably concerned with how they were to evaluate student performance in online venues. Their strong interest in using online resources with built-in score keeping, as well as creating exercises that could be scored and tracked, evidence this perception of evaluation’s purposes and processes. Post ‘fishbowl’ activity, however, there is some shift in their thinking about evaluating student learning.

*What I found most amazing about this collaboration was to see how experts work and to learn from them...it was interesting for me to observe my students*

Table 3 *Data matrix of faculty stances: role of teacher*

PARTICIPANT	PRE-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE	POST-FISHBOWL REFLECTION
Faculty1	...engages students in “significant work”, has high expectations, provides authentic learning experiences and learning strategies, knows his/her subject matter, uses multiple teaching methods, focuses on higher cognitive skills, cares about students and their success.	Strategically the teacher questions, challenges, coaxes and keeps quiet.  ...from being a one-man show the teacher becomes a partner.  ...a helper rather than a master.  Stimulus to reexamine me as a teacher.
Faculty2	Intuitively rely on my experience and understanding.  I always try to engage students, awake interest in them and create an atmosphere where they are able to build higher understanding.	Authentic, motivated conversations with incidental attention drawn to the language they used.  Traditional classes are more teacher-centered while e-learning is more learner-centered.
Faculty3	A teacher plans and prepares lessons, selects materials and activities, organizes the work of students and facilitates it.	I’m observing now online conversations with my students with our American partner and admire the way he can engage all the students.  I am grateful as now I understand how to use instructional conversations in online teaching.  It was easy to find teachable moments because my students were intermediate level and made a lot of mistakes.
Faculty4	Do you remember how [the instructors] usually asked a lot of questions and provided the sources we could find the answers? I tend to do the same.	-mediator -initiator -psychologist I use more learner-centered tasks now.
Faculty5	Clever, wise, patient, open for new ideas, ready to explore new domains.  The teacher overlooks participation and directs discussion.	I adore calling attention to forms and lexis. Online teaching made it my favourite and always a must.

*conversing with our American partner. I really admired the way X could engage my students into communication by using different pictures, photos, maps, and links to different online resources which allowed for seamless integration of the medium*

Table 4 *Data matrix of faculty stances: purposes and processes of evaluation*

PARTICIPANT	PRE-COURSE QUESTIONNAIRE	POST-FISHBOWL REFLECTION
Faculty1	<p>...evaluation of online tasks is the most difficult and controversial part of work. There has been no definite answer so far for grading blogging activities. To give marks for students' every post makes it too time-consuming, not not grade them at all is no good, either. In our situation it is better to grade essays which they write as an obligatory task. Possibly blogging activity may be included into cumulative mark that students get at the end of the term. As to those Hot Potatoes exercises they may be graded, as Moodle allows to do it easily. Or else, there may be given a general vocabulary test based on several units.</p>	<p>At the lessons I showed them the mistakes they made, and we worked on them together. There were many common mistakes they made, which helped me understand the students' weaknesses in grammar and lexis.</p> <p>When the strategies are employed in online environments any aspect of student output is in control and can immediately be drawn attention to.</p> <p>My attitude certainly changed. I will continue.</p>
Faculty2	<p>Problem for me to evaluate student posts on my blog.</p> <p>I specify the number of vocabulary words they have to use.</p>	<p>I find such a way of correcting errors more effective as it makes students reflect and provokes curiosity.</p> <p>I am enraptured with their mastery of communication.</p>
Faculty3	<p>A teacher corrects mistakes, monitors and evaluates students' performance and their progress.</p>	<p>We discussed their common mistakes at our lessons.</p> <p>They used English to communicate and paid close attention to their mistakes.</p>
Faculty4	<p>If a student makes the same mistake over and over again or makes too many mistakes, I usually send him/her a message with my explicit feedback to avoid embarrassment and de-motivation... this feedback lists a student's mistakes and their remedies.</p>	<p>Online corrections can be supportive and done more in an implicit way so a student would not lose motivation.</p> <p>My students have increased their understanding of US cultures, enriched their vocabulary and revised some grammar. They learnt some social rules of structuring their messages.</p>
Faculty5	<p>No comments</p>	<p>They would have participated more if I had assigned grade.</p>

*into the conversation. I got a chance to see how to organize and hold discussion activities in written asynchronous environment to see my students learning.*

(Faculty3)

As was reported in course questionnaires, course discussion threads, and in the ‘Moodle fishbowl’ reflection assignment, there appears to be some movement away from teacher-centered toward student-centered concepts of language education. We are, however, far from making claims that actual changes in practices have or will result. What is very clear is that faculty awareness has been raised concerning the potential pedagogical strengths of learner-centered activity in asynchronous online environments.

Whether and how faculty appropriate any of these techniques in their live or online teaching is yet to be seen.

## 5 Conclusion

As language faculty continue to move all or part of their instruction to online venues, language faculty professional development takes on an increasingly important role. As with traditional f2f language teaching, understanding the contextual affordances of effective teaching processes can be supported via observation and discussions of model teaching. An affordance of CMC, the egalitarian participation structures of asynchronous online venues, structures that are the foundation of learner-centered, generative language learning, can thus be witnessed, discussed, conceptualized and possibly valued by those participating in professional development. The ‘Moodle fishbowl’ activity used in this language faculty professional development project provided opportunities for faculty in training to witness their own students’ learning and the value that can be derived from knowing students’ backgrounds and background knowledge as well as their current competence in EFL in action. Additionally, by looking into the ‘Moodle fishbowl’, faculty witnessed online instructional conversation strategies in action, strategies used in response to the many teachable moments learner-centered online conversations can manifest. The activity provided a window on ICs as they are used and responded to in asynchronous learning venues.

If a key imperative in professional development for online language teaching is to build the expertise educators need to “provide a setting in which learners can develop the socioaffective, sociocognitive and organizational skills that are prerequisites of collaboration” (Hampel, 2009: 47), then direct experience with the same is essential. We have attempted to map out possible shifts in thinking in the four areas of change from teacher-centered to student-centered practices as a means of tracking the influence of the ‘Moodle fishbowl’ activity. Participant reports, conversations, and reflections are promising in this regard. A caveat, however, is in order. The project enjoyed the luxury of working with knowledgeable, experienced EFL educators with superior mastery and fluency in English instruction. Because of this luxury, the ‘Moodle fishbowl’ activity was thus free from Tarone and Allwright’s “noninterface fallacy”, the misfitting of novice educators into classrooms or, in our case, observation of expert teaching (Tarone & Allwright, 2005). The solid experiential base of the EFL faculty with the immediate prospect of teaching some or all of their EFL

courses using online venues, in conjunction with the professional development sequences provided, have potentially brought some conceptual shift as regards language teaching broadly and online language teaching in particular. In short, given the specific context of this CALL professional development project, the ‘Moodle fishbowl’ approach is a viable one in supporting language faculty transition to teaching online.

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### **Appendix A: Affordances of asynchronous online teaching and learning environments**

- -convenience
- -connectivity
- -membership (playing field is leveled)
- -authentic audiences
- -tailored audiences
- -strategies to compensate for lack of non-verbal info
- -richness of information (links, multimedia)
- -time to focus and review
- -time to compose, resources to compose
- -time and opportunity to reflect
- -opportunity to witness and track learning
- -opportunity to demonstrate learning

### **Appendix B: Pre-Course Questionnaire**

1. What is a good teacher?
2. What is a good student?
3. What are the roles of a teacher in a classroom?
4. In what ways have your ideas and beliefs about language teaching and learning changed over the years that you've been a professional educator? What do you think prompted those changes?
5. How do you think your language learning objectives might be achieved online?
6. What do you hope to learn here from your TEWOL projects? [for example, new teaching strategies, new ways to think about language education, increase student motivation, etc)
7. How might online classroom interaction be different from f2f interaction with your students?
8. Do you think your image as an online teacher will be different from the one your students and colleagues know of you already? How?
9. Can you envisage any supports or obstacles in dealing with your colleagues in the online environment?

From Meskill & Anthony, 2010.

### **Appendix C: Post-Fishbowl Reflection**

These open-ended statements can guide you in developing your summary essay. Use any of these suggested reflection starters as you put together your observations of the collaborations and compose your summary report to share with us all.

I was surprised when

What I find most amazing about these collaborations is

Before this project, I never thought that

My observations led me to understand

Some of the things I will think about doing in my online teaching are

It was easy/not easy to find teachable moments because

Some examples of ICs that I really like are

Some of the ways I integrated what happened in the collaborations in my live classroom are

I noticed that certain strategies that SUNY participants employed facilitated interaction better than others; such as

I am concerned that

I feel challenged by

I learned that