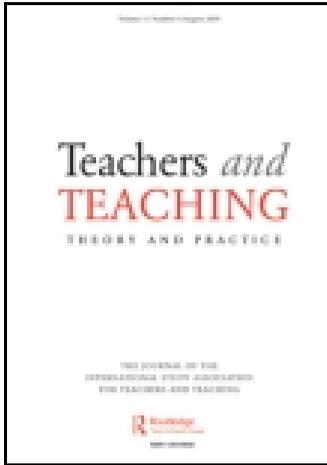


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### Voicing the challenges faced by an innovative teacher community

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## Voicing the challenges faced by an innovative teacher community

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This research draws on sociocultural theories of learning and activity theory to explore the challenges faced by an innovative community of teachers in Central Finland. The aim of the teacher community was to develop a stream of foreign-language (FL)-mediated teaching and learning in the locality from kindergarten to upper secondary level. To achieve this goal, the teachers needed to form coherent groups within the member schools, as well as between the schools. The aim of this research is to give voice to the challenges identified by the teachers and in so doing give voice to the teacher community itself. Recognising the voice of this community also contributes to a broader conceptualisation of teachers and teaching both within and beyond the classroom. The data were gathered during a number of community activities and thematically analysed to identify recurring challenges the participants identified and encountered. The challenges became manifest in both the talk and activities of the community. The positive teacher responses to the community highlighted the value of this kind of interaction for often isolated teacher practitioners. The wealth of data also produced through these activities suggests that further exploration and development of teacher activity outside of the classroom would be a worthwhile endeavour.

**Keywords:** sociocultural theory; teacher community; teacher challenges; teacher voice

### Foreign-language-based innovation in Central Finland

This article reports findings from research with a teacher community in Central Finland, drawing on the sociocultural family of learning theories (Roth & Lee, 2007) to frame both the activities of this group and the findings. This professional community includes teachers from kindergarten to upper secondary school. The link between these teachers is the desire to launch a sustainable stream in foreign-language (FL)-mediated teaching–learning within their mainstream educational context. In other words, these teachers hope to offer their pupils opportunities to first play in an FL (English), alongside their native tongue (Finnish). In primary school, the pupils learn to ‘be’ in English with a minimum of one hour a week in which the pupils experience a school subject through English, in addition to formal language lessons from grade 3 on. The lower secondary school aims for learning through the FL with a select number of FL-mediated courses on offer, whilst the upper secondary school provides a rigorous programme of study through English. FL-mediated teaching–learning is in-line with European Language Policy recommendations (European Commission, 2005)

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with this innovation promoted as a highly efficient way to support FL learning simultaneously enhancing subject learning (Baetens Beardsmore, 2008). Whilst the local educational authorities allow, and to some degree appreciate, the teachers' innovative efforts, little support is provided in concrete terms. Some teacher-members of the community have up to 15 years of experience in FL-mediated teaching-learning, whilst other members are new to this approach. The successful completion of the National Language Test (YKI) certifies official competence for FL-mediating teachers; but neither this nor special pedagogic training is always required. The ambitions of this community are based on the professional integrity and interest of the teacher-members hoping to provide a broader educational experience for their pupils. To realise their goal, the community faced challenges in terms of its identity, professional knowledge and classroom-based activities. It is the identification of these challenges that is explored and reported here.

The participant-observer had the privilege of knowing the school staff through different professional activities. Through these relationships, the opportunity to form a networked community grew. Initiation of the community began as more action than research, but as the richness of the interactions and the benefits of the community came to the fore, the action and research started to come together. 'The view that knowledge is held and distributed within groups' (Edwards, 2000, p. 199) seemed to be increasingly relevant in the interactions of this professional community. The role of the participant-observer became to coordinate the community meetings and to suggest themes for the sessions. In this role, the participant-observer belonged to the community as an inside-outsider, and the process of gathering data was approved by the community.

Teaching has been compared to, among others, improvised performance (Sawyer, 2004) and the conducting of music (Alexander, 2001). These characterisations reflect the complexity of classroom activity and the key role the teacher has in what happens, when and how. Teaching is clearly not, however, the entrenched functioning of an individual, rather an identity fundamentally affected by context and experience, collegial support and political climate (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006). In some senses, teaching epitomises the 'fluidity and flux' of modern societies (Edwards, 2006, p. 169) 'still constrained by the artefacts and social processes that belong to pre-reform practices' (Edwards, 2000, p. 198). In Finland, teachers are free from inspections and national testing (Simola, 2005), however, a tension exists 'between a progressive participatory rhetoric and an incipient managerialist culture' (Webb et al., 2004, p. 84).

FL-mediated teaching-learning, as promoted by the EU, was introduced in Finland in the early 1990. In 1996, up to 24% of upper secondary schools offered some form of FL-mediated subject courses, but, by 2005, the number was 11%. In comprehensive schools the percentage fell from almost 10% to less than 5% (Lehti, Järvinen, & Suomela-Salmi, 2006). The lack of coordinated support at both school and administrative levels, in particular the isolation and subsequent exhaustion of innovative practitioners, significantly contributed to this decline. This teacher community's goals were to counter this isolation and to create a 'voice', in the Bakhtinian sense, to be heard by the educational administration at both municipal and national levels.

Prior to the creation of a public voice, however, the community needed to find its own 'private voice' and to recognise itself as a community. By coming together on a regular basis and discussing issues relevant to teacher activity, the teacher-members began to develop relational agency, 'a capacity to align one's thought and actions with

those of others in order to interpret problems of practice and to respond to those interpretations' (Edwards, 2006, p. 169). The thematic discussions included, for example, why teachers were invested in this innovation, identifying the key concerns and gaps in practice, defining what resources would be most useful and why, how teaching and classroom culture are conceptualised. In these discussions, the teachers went beyond 'sharing information and the coordination of social interaction ... [rather] ... a joint, dynamic engagement with ideas amongst partners' (Mercer, 2004, p. 139) began to surface. In this setting, talk was 'used to enable joint intellectual activity' (Mercer, 2004, p. 140) between peers. The focal activity here, then, focuses on an important dimension of teacherhood – professional interaction of teachers discussing pedagogy, innovation and the challenges teachers face in practice. Through this talk-based activity, teachers not only experienced 'supportive colleagues and the sharing of good practice ... or a sense of community' (Day et al., 2006, p. 183) but started to move towards 'professional development ... repositioning oneself in relation to aspects of knowledge through changing one's interpretations of contexts and the possibilities for action within them' (Edwards, 2000, p. 200). As the teachers reported in the final whole-community meeting, 'We understand now the big picture. It's more concrete – we know the other people doing the same thing. We've proved that cooperation is possible and needed' (Teacher notes session 5). The process of creating a community through talk simultaneously produced a voice for the challenges the teachers commonly encountered and in so doing contributes to a broader conceptualisation of teacherhood both within and beyond the classroom.

### **Community members, meetings and data collection**

The whole community comprised approximately 25 members, four kindergarten staff, 12 primary teachers, 10 subject teachers, two head-teachers and the research observer-participant. Sociocultural research perceives 'communication, thinking and learning as related processes' (Mercer, 2004, p. 138) understanding education 'as a dialogic process, with students and teachers working within settings which reflect the values and social practices of schools as cultural institutions' (2004, p. 139). This perspective frames the exploratory research reported here with the notion of 'relational agency' providing an apt description of the relationships developed within this community. The whole community came together five times over an 18-month period. Each meeting involved a significant amount of group discussion, in addition to short presentations including, for example, the development of the primary school curriculum by the primary staff. Each discussion group included staff from the different educational partners, and a group secretary made notes collected at the end of each session. These notes were then collated by the observer-participant and redistributed to the teacher-members for comments. These notes are one data-set for this research.

The staff from the lower secondary school, as the most recent partner to adopt this innovation, had seven additional school-based meetings with between four and eight participants. The aim of these discussions was to establish regular FL-mediated courses within the subject timetable. This school had previously attempted FL-mediated courses, but overwhelmed staff had given up. To create a sustainable programme, the school aimed to form a core team responsible for these courses. The team held seven sessions intended to enhance their understanding of FL-based pedagogy and talk in education. The discussions aimed to construct a joint understanding of the demands and characteristics of different subject and language pedagogies

leading to opportunities for collaboration. The fourth and sixth meetings were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions provide the second data-set for the research reported here.

One of the subject teachers in the school team allowed the participant-observer into two FL-mediated science courses implemented for the first time in the school. These courses followed the regular timetable of two double lessons (90 minutes) a week over an eight-week period. This provided valuable insight into a subject teacher's initial encounter with FL-based teaching-learning. Observation notes were maintained throughout the two courses (in addition to video recordings), and each discussion with the teacher was also noted down. It is these notes that provide the third data-set in this research. The three data-sets provide a cross-sectional view of the teacher community supporting the sociocultural view of a workplace being of a contextually complex, embedded nature (Edwards, 2000). This paper focuses on the challenges identified through the community interactions and at different levels of community activity (see Figure 1 below).

To ensure the integrity of this research, the findings have been previewed and accepted by community members. The whole-community data emphasise the challenge of formulating a professional identity that can be recognised and resourced. The school-based data highlight the challenge teachers face in conceptualising and verbalising pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986, 1999) as well as in introducing change into an established pedagogic culture. The classroom-based data, as the context would suggest, foreground the challenge of praxis (Roth & Lee, 2007), that is, the gap between theory and practice in an FL-mediated setting. The aim of this research is to explore the challenges experienced at these different community levels.

## Methodology

In this research, the talk-based data are understood as both a product and process of teacher cognition (Mercer, 2004; Roth & Lee, 2007). The first two data-sets in particular draw on teacher discussions in which teachers seek to explicitly describe their professional experiences and pedagogic repertoires. The third data-set slightly differs

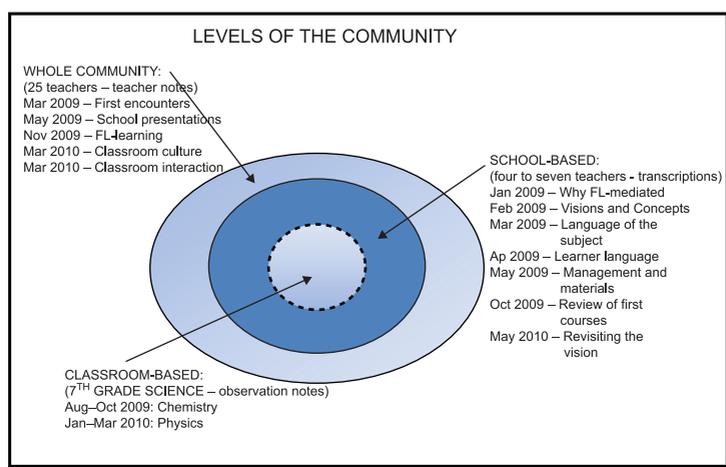


Figure 1. Levels and activities of the community.

in that in addition to talk as mediated cognition, teacher-activity is also understood as a form of mediated cognition (Roth & Lee, 2007). The data-sets are not symmetrical in that the same questions are not asked at each level; however, they are complimentary in that they each provide insight into the professional activity of teachers at different levels providing a more holistic view of teachers and teaching.

The three data-sets were thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the analysis focusing on the challenge of introducing FL-mediated teaching–learning. During the review of the data-set any reference to difficulties, problems, questions or concerns noted by the teachers and in the third data-set by the participant-observer were extracted and listed separately. In addition to explicit references to difficulties, instances when teachers struggled to express or jointly construct understanding were also identified as a challenge. The extracted data were reviewed again, and thematically similar comments were gradually collated together. The entire data-set was not combined to form a whole, rather the identified themes continued to be contextualised by the original discussion setting. As the process continued, the data-sets were organised according to the different challenges, rather than according to the initial discussion prompts. This is not to claim that the original themes did not play an instrumental role in framing teacher discussions as different challenges were identified by the participants. As a form of realist research, the session themes were explicitly intended to help teachers critically review FL-mediated teaching–learning. Examples of transcribed extracts are available in the appendix.

Although the participant-observer provided the themes for the different sessions, the discussions were open-ended and developed according to teacher interest. The teachers worked with or around participant-observer’s questions as they felt appropriate and shared responsibility for developing the discussions as equal participants (see the appendix). As the discussions were not strictly directed, the results do not show whether one challenge was considered greater than another by the community members. The teachers were free to contribute or not as they wished, although the hope was expressed at the beginning of each meeting that everyone would participate. Feedback on the sessions was also regularly sought, checking that the teachers felt the themes to be relevant and helpful. During the data-analysis process, the original notes and transcriptions were regularly reread to maintain the integrity of the original expressions.

### **Results/findings**

The findings are reported in a way which reflects the original data collection settings. The first set of challenges reported here come from the whole-community discussions, the second set from the school-based discussions and the final set from the classroom setting. The order in which the challenges are presented does not reflect any order of priority or how many teachers considered each challenge to be a challenge, nor how to address the challenge. The challenges reported here featured in the talk between teachers and in teacher activity. As such this research hopes to give voice to experiences that could have remained silent, but by voicing these challenges, it is hoped that the possibility for further knowledge growth and action can be realised.

#### ***Whole-community discussions***

This section includes the key challenges identified by the whole community in relation to teacher repertoires and learning cultures. The ‘repertoire of approaches from which

they [teachers] can select on the basis of fitness for purpose in relation to the learner, the subject-matter and the opportunities and constraints of the context' (Alexander, 2008, p. 102) is fundamentally affected in an FL-mediated context. The *personal language proficiency* of the teacher becomes a question: whereas an FL user can opt to be silent (Harder, 1980) this is no option for an FL-mediating teacher. Teacher language proficiency was not, however, the only FL-based challenge. As teachers began to share their different classroom 'ground rules' for FL-use, the question of *what new 'norms' should be established* became part of teacher discussion: which language should be used when? How prepared were pupils to use the FL? How could all pupils participate regardless of language/ability level? How did pupils understand FL-mediated education? How could some form of continuity through the different school levels be realised? These questions directly challenged teacher identity and activity.

Finnish teachers often have the 'luxury' of ready-made textbooks in each subject of the curriculum from the beginning of primary school. Whilst there is no obligation to use textbooks, it is often through textbook-based activities that curriculum requirements are implemented (Webb et al., 2004). FL-based subject textbooks have only recently come to the attention of textbook publishers and remain few and far between. The need to *develop materials* extends teacher repertoires requiring time and skills not usually employed. Teachers are not the only ones in the classroom socialised into textbook-based teaching-learning. When teachers work without textbooks, some pupils find this unsettling (Skinnari, 2010) fun perhaps but not 'real learning'. From this perspective, teacher repertoires are being expanded in two directions not only with regard to the development of materials, but also with the need to re-socialise learner expectations and repertoires. The challenges here relate to classroom culture both in terms of activity and underlying assumptions.

Some of these teachers had several years of experience in FL-mediated teaching-learning with first-language Finnish pupils. These teachers have developed repertoires based on a shared first language. As the student population has begun to vary, however, this has given rise to the question: *'Where to begin when pupils don't know Finnish?'* (Teacher notes 1). This is an important question with implications not only for FL-mediated learning when English is the language of instruction for Finnish students, but when Finnish is the language of instruction for immigrant students.

Another challenge related to teacher repertoires can again be framed as a question: *How to encourage 'playing with' language and motivation at different stages of development?* During the third whole-community discussion, the nature of FL learning changes across the educational spectrum was critically considered. Through this discussion, teachers queried how to maintain the natural enthusiasm of children 'even over puberty' (Teacher notes 1) as the demand for language use in subject learning increases. Arguably, the critical consideration of this issue with colleagues from different educational settings helped develop a far broader picture of the learning continuum and the need for collaboration to support motivation.

These discussions highlighted the *challenges of building a professional community*. This was expressed by hopes as well as questions. The teacher-members wanted to avoid cliques; they hoped instead for a positive community which shared materials, visited classes and jointly developed school curricula and whole school vision. Closely linked to this challenge was the question of *how to gain recognition from educational authorities?* Whilst the municipal authorities provided a small budget to support the whole-community activities, no word on concrete measures for support or

acknowledgement of innovative efforts was forthcoming. Teachers also began to ponder *how to engage parents*. In the discussions, parents were listed as important partners, with the potential to provide feedback and support, to act as resources if they understood this innovation. The discussions also questioned *how to make the creative use of existing resources* such as the international classes and staff housed within the same school as the FL-mediated classes. This point was raised in the initial whole-community discussion and in the final discussion but in more or less the same terms.

### ***School-based discussions***

These discussions included the core team from the lower secondary school, colleagues familiar to one another but without collaborative teaching experience. The first challenge facing this group was of a more practical nature: how to decide *which pupils participate in FL-mediated classes, how and why*. It was not feasible for this school to offer FL-mediated classes for all students and to continue with only the pupils from the community primary school separated one cohort of feed-primary school pupils from the others. The teachers felt powerless to answer this question as the final decision lay with the head-teacher responsible for the wider school policy. The core team also faced the challenge of *gaining support from the wider school community*. The teachers hoped to recruit more team members, promote understanding and to counter negative attitudes expressed by other staff members.

*Creating partnerships* was a key goal and a significant challenge for the school-based team. Two models for FL-mediated learning were introduced as a tool to support the conceptualisation of subject teaching, foreign language pedagogy and the overlapping interests of the two. *Conceptualising subject teaching* was a significant challenge, as with other teacher groups (Shulman, 1999). Occasionally, the teachers insisted that all the pupils needed to learn a subject though the FL was words, lists of terms: ‘they need words, terms, they have to understand terms that’s the problem’ (A – Oct 2009). During the discussions, however, new questions began to be voiced by the teachers, indicating a change in their subject conceptualisation:

Ok, factual knowledge. What is that in my subject in emotional skills? What is factual knowledge? That there are emotions? That’s a fact, that we all have emotions, feelings, but how it refers to these key er concepts subjects, in a way it’s all combined (B – April 2009).

As the subject colleagues continued to explore the language of their subject and accompanying activities, the English teacher team member responded by saying, ‘the language we learn [in the EFL classroom] is more simple than the one they do, in a way ... I don’t really know how we could help the students’ (C – April 2009). This is not to imply that collaboration could not take place between the formal FL classroom and FL-mediated courses, but *conceptualising possibilities and practical activities for collaboration* beyond the language checking of material is a challenge: ‘if you mean that integration just that we work the same things. I’d have to think about it now...’ (A – Oct 2009).

Pedagogical content knowledge is described as the ‘active interaction of subject knowledge, school knowledge and pedagogical understanding and experience’ (Banks, Leach, & Moon, 1999, p. 95). Three teachers in this team had taught international classes in addition to working through Finnish. It was assumed that this

experience would be good preparation for FL-mediated teaching–learning, but the *inadequacy of their previous experience* was quickly realised:

It's really different (laughter) because English speaking class they know English already ... I can just teach and even if I say something wrong they correct me (laughter), so I can just concentrate on chemistry. But ... in this chemistry group ... they don't know English very well, so ... I am kind of language teacher so I need to figure out how they would understand me. (D – Oct 2009)

FL-mediated teaching *and* learning created a new role with increased responsibilities. The teachers found FL-mediated teaching–learning disorientating: ‘and kind of searching out what is the level that I can start’ (D – Oct 2009). As the teachers contributed examples based on *pedagogical content knowledge*, the FL appeared to distort the examples. The ‘saturated-fat cat’ mnemonic in Finnish Domestic Science became a more poetic ‘satisfied cat’, a popular Finnish children’s feudal publication ‘Koiramäki’ (Doghill) was distanced and the validity of familiar terms in language teaching was questioned. The teachers found this disorientation highly stressful.

Whilst the focal innovation for these teachers was FL-mediated teaching–learning, the sociocultural perspective framing this research connects with the learning environment targeted in the Finnish Curriculum: ‘the learning environment must also support interaction ... It must promote dialogue and guide the pupils...’ (NBE, 2004, p. 17). The increased interaction sociocultural pedagogy encourages and complements the finding in FL-based research that interaction is a fundamental requirement in FL-mediated teaching–learning (Baetens Beardsmore, 2008). *Adopting a different perspective* was a significant challenge voiced in teacher-talk. A ‘culture of talk’ was initially described as alien, ‘I think it’s not natural to Finnish people’ (A – April 2009). Nevertheless, as the discussion continued, pedagogic reform promoting talk in the lower school curriculum was beginning to be apparent in the readiness of younger pupils to discuss. The pupil discussions the teachers described, however, suggested the emergence of a polarised culture of talk: ‘I want them to participate because they give so much out, but the way they do it quiets everybody else’ (B – April 2009).

As the discussion continued, teacher-training anecdotes surfaced in which trainees were required to produce scripted lesson plans with minutes of talk accounted for even in recent years: ‘That’s how we were educated. We find the roots!’ (B – April 2009). One teacher described how pupils spontaneously discussed an example she had provided. Initially, the teacher had gladly observed the discussions, ‘but still I thought that, ‘yes, shut up!’ Don’t speak anything, let me speak, it’s not my fault it’s the education’s fault of course, the traditions, that we have to control the class, and I think that’s a difficulty’ (A – April 2009). This illustrates the challenge of a cultural shift when introducing an innovation. A *culture of talk* challenged not only teacher ability to model and manage discussion, but to also culturally adapt to a new role perceived as relinquishing authority. The teachers also expressed confusion as to how they could evaluate learning with ‘numbers’ and ‘concrete results’ if class time was spent talking, leading to complaints over group size and dynamics indicating a sense of powerlessness within the existing system.

### *Classroom-based challenges*

We now turn to the findings from two seventh-grade FL-mediated science courses from autumn 2009 and spring 2010. The seventh grade is the first grade in the lower

secondary school. The pupils were an exceptionally eclectic mix for Finland including a number of international and immigrant pupils, pupils with FL-mediated learning experience and some without, plus three Special Education Needs (SEN) pupils. The participant-observer was present to observe and occasionally assist pupils using English. In the first course, a Finnish classroom assistant was also present and used English for the majority of her interactions with pupils. The participant-observer and science teacher regularly discussed their perceptions and experiences of the courses.

Gutiérrez and Rogoff advise against ‘pigeonholing individuals into categories [rather] ... helping students develop dexterity in using both familiar and new approaches’ (2003, p. 23). The diverse mix of students in the science classes represented a broad range of educational and personal experiences. As the class culture was established, identifying and supporting the *existing repertoires of learners* was a challenge. Some pupils had FL-mediated learning experience, but helping pupils to recognise their skills and using this as a resource for other class members was difficult. Some pupils automatically wrote answers in English when the teacher asked a question in English, but if later the theoretical teaching continued in Finnish as the teacher wrote the answer on the board in Finnish, the English text was immediately erased from pupil books. This provided some indication of learner repertoire, but, as it was so silently portrayed, it did not remain a feature of learner activity. Initially, pupils repeated words under their breath but as this did not become a formalised feature of this classroom, this disappeared and the pupils actually reduced the amount of English in their peer interactions.

The science classes quickly became a *highly routinised environment*, as Alexander explains, ‘together with pupils, teachers create and become incorporated within a micro-culture ... The evolution of the classroom micro-culture also allows – indeed requires – them to develop procedures for regulating the complex dynamics of pupil-pupil relationships’ (2001, p. 325). As with many science classrooms, the general pattern after the review of homework was to introduce the key concept, to provide instructions for the experiment, to carry out the experiment in groups and to write up the theory on the board before assigning the textbook pages for homework. Test-based lessons broke this pattern but were also highly structured with pupils answering revision questions in the lesson prior to the test, reviewing the answers with the teacher, doing the test, reviewing the test with the teacher. A detailed exploration of the culture established in this classroom goes beyond the scope of this paper; nevertheless, the classroom routine is a fundamental pedagogic tool whether yielded consciously or unconsciously by the teacher. The challenge appears to be to recognise the actions, decisions, intentions behind the established routine and to abide by the established culture or to interrupt the established culture to advance learning.

This challenge clearly relates to teachers’ *professional knowledge* as ‘a complex amalgam of past knowledge, experiences of learning, a personal view of what constitutes ‘good’ teaching and belief in the purposes of the subject’ (Banks et al., 1999, p. 95) incorporating and going beyond Shulman’s Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). After the initial shock of FL-mediated teaching–learning, the teacher began re-establishing her professional repertoire by providing clear lesson plans and aims for the pupils. Other challenges to professional knowledge remained, however, including how to frame activities without exhausting pupils with the introduction? How to create space for everyone to participate? When to dare to ‘stretch’ pupils? And from a slightly different perspective, how to enhance professional knowledge rather than just recover comfortable practice?

The final challenge identified in the classroom-based data was how to *engage the new language partner*. That is, how to validate the presence or role of the FL in the subject classroom for pupils and teachers. Baetens Beardsmore describes an FL-mediating teacher as ‘without being aware ... teaching the content mainly through the L1 and providing a word-list in L2, yet ... under the illusion that he was providing content and language integrated instruction’ (1999, pp. 28–29). This comment, however, does little to identify the pedagogic challenges faced by the teacher. The findings reported here show managing opportunities to use the FL, to use social talk to support learning, to support simultaneous language-based activities often used in classrooms, to understand the complex role of writing as a skill and cultural expectation, to address discontent in the classroom and to foster the transition from first language use to FL-mediated teaching–learning are significant challenges which require further attention.

## Discussion

The teacher-participants voiced interest in this innovation for several reasons: it was an opportunity for professional development within the classroom, to modernise their subject pedagogy, to internationalise learning and they enjoyed the fruits of their labour. Edwards writes that ‘the contradictions and turbulence identified within systems are characterized as points for systemic adaptation or expansive learning’ (2000, p. 201). The challenges presented here are ‘contradictions and turbulence’ and hopefully by voicing these challenges ‘expansive learning’ can become a possibility.

The individual voices which first entered the discussions came together to create a community voice. The cross-sectional view of the different community activity levels allows different types of challenges the community faces to come to the fore. In the whole-community activities, challenges related to teacher and community *identity* were particularly prominent as teachers discussed who they were, why they were invested in this innovation and the resources they required to move forward with their professional activities. The school-based activities directed the focus of the teachers towards subject pedagogies and the role of language within education. The challenges from these activities related to the *conceptualisation* of pedagogies and talk in education and the challenge of *articulating need*. Classroom activity highlighted the challenge of *praxis*. Classroom culture is established intentionally or accidentally, and the immediacy of pupil needs and a timetabled curriculum drive teacher activity. The classroom notes capture a snapshot of a dynamically charged environment drawing on all the resources (and more) at the disposal of a teacher. Each of these levels is required to create a balanced voice for the challenges teachers face when adopting FL-mediated teaching–learning. Whilst similar challenges could be identified at different levels of activity, this reappearance perhaps suggests the crucial nature of these particular challenges.

This thematic analyses ‘reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81) as the teachers began to reconsider together an environment full of assumptions and aspirations. The relational agency that this experience began to engender may be part of the key in responding to these challenges. The questions which arose within the community not only pointed the finger at external agents, but also to the teachers themselves and the repertoires present in their most familiar arena for professional activity: the classroom. Whilst the challenges these teachers face would not be identical in any other situation (Northfield, 1996), the process of teachers coming together to find a voice, working in a professional capacity

outside of the classroom is hopefully generalisable to other instances of teacher development work.

### Future research

The research reported here is exploratory, a starting point not a conclusion. It would be interesting to know whether similar challenges can be found within other communities attempting to adopt innovation educational approaches. It might also be worth investigating which challenges really do require further training and outside support to be surmountable. Teacher communities possess stores of knowledge (Edwards, 2000), their own rich resources need to be recognised and drawn on. Following a teacher community seeking to overcome challenges could perhaps significantly contribute to the conceptualisation of teacher professionals. Two other areas are of particular interest from a sociocultural perspective – how did these teachers together construct their professional knowledge? The transcribed data in particular document how the teachers began to think together about the challenges they faced. A more detailed exploration of this process might provide a useful insight into teachers as peers constructing knowledge, not only in the classroom with novice pupils. Finally, the culture of the classroom is an all-pervasive feature of classroom life and activity. The cross-sectional view here implies how broader conceptualisations of teacher professionals and teaching can be developed when different levels of community activity can be voiced.

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## Appendix. Discussion extracts

### *Extract 1 – spring 2009*

- P.O.: In a way, we could say that the students are being apprenticed in a specific world view, so through the home economics they're getting a certain view of nutrition, and then if they were doing the same subject in Chemistry, presumably they'd get a different view of nutrition, or the chemicals involved in that. An apprenticeship being this idea of process. X, please?
- TB.: Well, I think I got something new from your previous talk, not just to think about an English lesson, erm CLIL lesson but to think about learner language in a regular Finnish lesson...

### *Extract 2 – spring 2009*

- TB.: I'm sorry to say this, but I think so. With the workbook, passively filling the words, not to use in a collaborative, interaction way what you have just learnt. It doesn't always happen. I don't know enough about nowadays, sorry I don't criticise you, but I really think that erm we as teachers, first we need this enlightenment, or whatever you say ... to really know what we are trying to do here.
- TC.: And of course, it's er, er the frame, we have this 25 years, so how do you do? How do you change?
- TB.: Yes, and how do you motivate them?
- TC.: Because in a group like this where everybody is eager to learn something you get good discussions and you learn new things, but in that er group it's not always possible.
- TB.: Yeah, that's why we have to start small.
- TC.: Yes, with small steps.
- TB.: Yeah.

### *Extract 3 – autumn 2009*

- P.O.: They could start this thinking in English. So that's where we'd be going to. Does that somehow for you gather together the different dimensions of it, do you think it leaves something out or distorts it somehow? (20 sec) PAUSE
- TC.: I think that's about all I can think of, it consists of ... a lot of things
- TA.: I think that somehow our colleagues are in a way worried and a little bit critical, that if how are they able, the students able to understand that they thought that they don't understand them in Finnish, and not in English, someone said they have to learn these first in Finnish and be sure, and only a few students can then use English. That's ...
- TC.: Have you heard? Because it was a surprise to me – because I was, is someone so worried about their Finnish?

### *Extract 4 – autumn 2009*

- P.O.: How do you think you could sort of work together?
- TA.: Hmm I have to think about it, because I think that I can use her, in a way,
- P.O.: Yeah.
- TA.: Check or something is this too difficult, or so on, or something like help me to write something down. But, if you mean that integration just that we work the same things.
- P.O.: Well I was just thinking, because the debate's coming, and you said how well they had prepared their reasons for and against, and then if there was a sort of team English teacher, then she could do some of the phrases, even if a few, useful little phrases just to say, to make suggestions or to give an alternative idea or something like that...
- TA.: Yeah ... yeah ... I'd have to think about it now...
- TC.: I wish the groups were a bit, bit smaller because if I think about my 7th grade, which is X, there are 26 pupils in the group I'm teaching XX to, it takes such a lot of energy to keep them quiet for two minutes for example, and er it would be so lovely to be able to do things,

**Extract 5 – autumn 2009**

P.O.: And then the language of stories, to be able to understand autobiography or something like that? Do they need to understand questions? I was just trying to...

TA.: All, I would say

P.O.: I was just thinking that if we could somehow identify the areas where they really need.

TA.: I think as I say with our history and civics are so abstract things, they need words, terms, they have to understand terms that's the problem. You have to know the kind of oma vapaus dihktaattori, that kind of things, and yeah, they are difficult in English and in Finnish anyway, so this is, they say that the language is difficult.

TA.: What is elinkeinovapaus in English by the way?

TC.: No idea, elinkeino sources of livelihood. But...

TA.: Laissez-faire, I use that.

**Extract 6 – autumn 2009**

P.O.: I was thinking that, in Chemistry when you've been setting up the experiments and then you're going round. Sometimes the students are asking quite interesting questions then, aren't they?

TD.: Yeah, they are.

P.O.: But none of the questions I don't think have, have they asked questions in English yet?

TD.: Not actually, just in Finnish.

P.O.: Yeah, we can just, hmm,

TD.: So they need some kind of encouragement to use English, and also express themselves. Like so they could say the findings, and that kind of things in English.