A self-study of mentoring and peer-coaching for professional learning

YANG, Min
HO, Suk Ping Angela
KO, Ngan Nei Tina
Educational Development Centre, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Abstract: What are the professional development needs of a new educational developer and what process of professional learning would s/he undergo? How could she be assisted with different methods that facilitate his or her professional learning? Although ample examples of research into educational development support for new teachers can be found in the literature, the support for new educational developers' professional development is rarely touched upon. Thus, it is meaningful that this self-study investigates the experience of professional learning of one of the authors of this paper as a new educational developer. We describe and scrutinise the process in which the new educational developer engaged in professional learning, facilitated by more experienced educational developers, particularly the other two authors as the mentor and the peer-coach. Self-study as the methodology guides the collection of qualitative data of such experiences pertinent to the new educational developer's professional tasks over half a year. Audio and textual data gathered comprise: audio/written records of discussions/conversations and e-mail correspondences among the authors and with academics involved; interviews with students; drafts of materials/documents; the authors' journal entries. Methods of data analysis encompass phenomenological analysis, heuristic analysis of discourse/observation and internal criticism of documents. Through the exploration of the research questions, this self-study contributes specifically to the understanding of the new educational developer's professional learning and its facilitation through a range of practical methods, particularly mentoring and peer-coaching.
Keywords: Professional learning; mentoring and peer-coaching; educational developers; collaboration; reflective practice, everyday conversation

Introduction
    What are the professional development and learning needs of a new educational developer and what process of professional learning would s/he undergo? How could she be assisted with different methods that facilitate his or her professional learning? Although ample examples of research into the support for new or more experienced teachers in their professional development and learning can be found in the literature (Dalmau and Guðjónsdóttir, 2002; Feiman-Nemer,

2003; Grunau et al., 1998; Klonsky and Klonsky, 1999; Norman and Feiman-Nemer, 2005; Kwo, 2004; Showers and Joyce, 1996), the facilitation of new educational developers' professional learning is rarely touched upon. Thus, it is meaningful that this self-study investigates the experience of professional learning of Min, one of the authors of this paper, as a new educational developer. We describe and scrutinise the process in which Min's professional learning were facilitated through a number of means, especially the mentoring and peer-coaching support provided by Angela and Tina, the other two authors, who are both experienced in educational development practice. In particular, we examine critically how mentoring and peer-coaching evolved to become the most effective methods for the facilitation of Min's professional learning, and how Min's ethical and practical knowledge about educational development gradually took shape as Min continually collaborated with her mentor, peer-coach and others and engaged in reflection on her practice.

In answering the two research questions put forward in the beginning of this section, we position ourselves as practitioner-researchers in the field of educational development1 in higher education (Bath and Smith, 2004; Eginns and Macdonald, 2003; Hubball and Burt, 2004; Haigh, 2005; Rowland, 2001; Webb, 1996). Through the exploration of these questions, this self-study seeks to contribute to the understanding of the professional learning of new educational developers (Fraser, 1999). As Bath and Smith (2004: 14) summarise, educational developers are those practitioners in higher education who routinely engage themselves in the development of teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum, the enquiry into higher education and the promotion of the scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education.

This self-study focuses particularly upon the authors' everyday experience related to the new educational developer's (i.e. Min's) practice of in-kind or customised support for academics in curriculum and instructional design, which is but one of the diverse practices that educational developers routinely perform. The models of teaching and curriculum design underlying our provision of the in-kind support practice are 'constructive alignment' proposed by Biggs (2003: 18-31) and 'outcome-based education' advocated by Spady (1994: 1) 2.

Collaboration is of particular significance both in our day-to-day educational development practice and in this self-study. As one of the phenomena studied in this self-study, collaboration takes place -
    (a) among the authors when fulfilling in-kind support tasks;

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[1] The terms 'educational development', 'academic development', 'academic staff development' and 'staff development' are used largely interchangeably in the literature (see, for example, Bath and Smith, 2004; Eginns and Macdonald, 2003; Webb, 1996).

[2] 'Constructive alignment' is defined by Biggs (*ibid*: 18-31) as building coherence into the teaching environment by aligning its components: students, teachers, curriculum, teaching methods, assessment procedures, teacher-student interaction climate and institutional climate. Such alignment is constructive because it adopts a constructivist view of learning (*ibid*; see also Crotty, 1998: 57-58). Spady (1994: 1; our italics) argues that 'Outcome-based education means starting with a clear picture of *what is important for students to be able to do*, then organising the curriculum, instruction, and assessment to make sure that this learning ultimately happens.' Although alignment among components of teaching and curriculum is central to both models, outcome-based education places an explicit focus on the intended outcomes for students to achieve. The model of criterion-referenced assessment is utilized to achieve the alignment of assessment with the learning outcomes (Biggs, 2003: 143-146; Spady, 1994: 39-40).

(b) between the authors and some academics (hereinafter referred to as 'collaborating academics') at our university in undertaking these in-kind support tasks;

(c) between the authors and two other educational developers in some of these tasks.

From an epistemological perspective, collaboration manifests the incorporation of social construction of knowledge and reflective practice (Griffiths and Poursanidou, 2005: 142; Bodone, Guðjónsdóttir and Dalmau, 2004; Griffiths, 2000) into the research process of this self-study as we co-operated in exploring and reflecting upon our own relevant experiences guided by the research questions.

Next, we go on with the discussion of the methodology of self-study and associated methods utilized in this research.

Methodology and methods

Self-study[3] is gaining recognition amongst educators as a research methodology that helps improving practice while contributing to knowledge about education (Laboskey, 2004; Berry and Loughran, 2002). The methodology bestows this research with three advantages. First, it permits the examination of our own multiple perspectives as practitioner-researchers, which help in obtaining triangulated data (Marshall and Rossman, 1995: 144). Further, it credits the investigation of and reflection upon collaborative endeavours by practitioner-researchers, a vital factor for the improvement of educational practice (see the previous section). Lastly, it encourages us to pay sufficient attention to the direct observation and critical examination of our everyday life experiences for a renewed understanding of such experiences (Crotty, 1998: 83-85).

For the purpose of this research, audio and textual data were gathered and analysed, as summarised in the table below. Interestingly, all the data, including the documents, were produced in our everyday educational development practice; and these naturally occurring data were continuously collected, which highlights the nature of this research of being self-initiated and improvement-aimed (Mishler, 1990).

Table 1: *Types of data and methods of data collection and analysis*

Type of data	Method of recording/storing the data	Method of analysis
1. Discussions between the authors and the collaborating academics	Audio records Written records	Heuristic analysis of discourse and observation
2. Discussions among the authors	Authors' journal entries	
3. Discussions within the ED team to which the authors belong	Audio records Authors' Journal entries	
4. Everyday conversations among the	Authors' journal entries	

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[3] Our idea of using self-study as the methodology was inspired by the research of Morwenna Griffith (2005) and Margaret Simms (2004), who are Min's former professor and fellow student respectively at Nottingham Trent University in UK.

authors		
5. E-mail correspondences among the authors and between the authors and friends	E-mail messages	
6. Reflective notes about observations, doubts, ideas and thoughts	Authors' journal entries	
7. Face to face interviews with three students (in two occasions respectively) for evaluating course materials developed by the collaborating academic or the authors	Audio records Written transcription	Phenomenological analysis
8. Subject materials and related documents	Electronic and printed documents	Internal criticism of documents

Heuristic analysis of discourse and observation is adapted from Paton's (1990, 71-73; see also Johnstone, 2002: 9; cited in Gillen and Petersen, 2005: 148) notion of 'heuristic inquiry'. The method requires that the researcher becomes deeply connected to the phenomenon that is personally experienced by the researcher or the co-researcher through immersion in the data of observation or discourse, so that the essence of the tacit, experiential meanings becomes illuminated and then synthesised.

Phenomenological analysis (Patton, 1990: 407-409; see also Hycner, 1985) involves three stages: (a) self-inspecting to become aware of presuppositions about the phenomena in question; (b) bracketing one's presuppositions while analysing the data as text; (c) describing the deeper meanings of the experience for the individual or the essence and structure of the experience.

In adapting Bell's (1999: 113-116) suggestion concerning internal criticism as a method of document analysis, we focus particularly on the following aspects:
  (a) The document's background: e.g. Was it created by the academic using it, or by his/her the programme leader or the academic teaching the subject previously?
  (b) Purposes of the document relative to the academic teaching the course and the students.
  (c) Its status of completeness: e.g. Does the subject document include information about the assessment method?
  (d) Its use by the academic and the students.

Professional learning and its facilitation for practitioners in educational settings
We examine below firstly the literature of professional learning in terms of the process of and factors involved in professional learning and secondly the facilitation of professional learning and growth in educational settings.

Writers in the field have considered professional learning from varied angles. Mezirow's (1996; 1998: 6) defines 'learning' within transformation theory as 'the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action'. Transformative learning enables the learner to engage in reflective action (ibid: 8). Following Mezirow's view, it would be essential that the practitioner strives to

establish a connection between one's prior knowledge and experience-based new knowledge, and between reflection and future action (see also Kreber, 2004).

Learning through reflection on experience is no alien idea in Confucian culture societies: As Confucius (551-479 BC) said: 'I hear and I forgot; I see and I remember; I do and I understand.' (McNeil, 2003). Confucius emphasizes the role of the educator as much as the role of the learner in the learning process, and recognises the significance of informed dialogues between the teacher and the learner tailored for the particular learner (Yang, 2005: 52-53).

Schön (1983; 1987) famously introduces the ideas of 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action', which are closely related to the practitioner's acquisition of professional artistry, the competence to function in 'unique, uncertain and conflicted' problem situations (ibid, 1987: 22-36). Professional artistry refers to tacit knowledge, the spontaneous, routinised and yet dynamic judgments, decisions and actions (ibid: 22-26). When an element of surprise or puzzlement emerges in our action, reflection-in-action may come into play, leading to on-the-spot experiment (new actions) (ibid: 26-36). Alternatively, we may reflect on action, trying to find out how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to the surprise. Nevertheless, it is the reflection upon past reflection-in-action that is most constructive to professional learning (ibid). Through these notions, Schön's idea of 'reflective practitioner' has become popular among educators and trainers (see, for example, Dalmau and Guðjónsdóttir's study, 2002).

The concept of 'situated learning' proposed by nature Lave and Wenger (1991) stresses the situated nature of any learning, including professional learning. They (ibid) argue that learning entails increasing learners' participation in communities of practices as whole persons living and acting in the 'lived-in world' (ibid: 49-52). They hold that learning should be viewed as legitimate peripheral participation, the product of which is both changing persons and changing communities of practice. Their concept of situated learning echoes Roger's (1983) humanistic idea that education should aim at facilitating the learner to become fully functioning persons in the world.

Similar to Lave and Wenger (1991), Eraut (1994; 2000) also explores the context-relatedness of professional learning. Yet, rather than studying the social construction of knowledge and its socio-political consequences for the learner like Lave and Wenger do, Eraut focuses on the cognitive process of the practitioner's learning embedded in the professional context. In mapping out the professional knowledge, Eraut (1994: 41- 47) distinguishes between 'technical knowledge' and 'practical knowledge' (Oakeshott's, 1962, cited in Eraut, 1994: 42; 47-48): the former is explicit knowledge learned from others; the latter is implicit and is learned in practice. He (ibid: 47-48) suggests that in striving to increase their professional practical knowledge, practitioners may follow the suggestion by Argyris and Schön (1974; cited in Eraut, 1994: 47-48) and seek from others good quality feedback on his or her practice in order to make his/her practical knowledge explicit.

To sum up, writers on professional learning give emphasis to reflection (critical reflection, reflection-in/on-action), collective dialogue and quality feedback for improved professional knowledge and performance. Moreover, they stress the situatedness or context-relatedness of

professional learning which indicates the significance for the practitioner to acquire practical and tacit knowledge through practice and reflection.

Next, we turn to studies of professional learning in the educational settings in Western and Chinese contexts. Dalmau and Guðjónsdóttir's study (2002) highlights the benefits of the conscious incorporation of systematic critical reflection and collegial dialogue into teacher training programmes. In their study, a 'Professional Working Theory' (PWT) instrument was exploited by different groups of student teachers through which they engaged themselves in a continual reflective discourse on teacher professionalism. A similar, though less sophisticate approach is reported by Kwo (2004). In her study, the teachers were supported by mentors to explore their stories of critical incidences through collective dialogues among themselves (ibid: 295-300). Through the reflective discourse, their 'authority from within' was awakened and they were empowered to listen to the 'teacher' dwelling in their hearts, that is, their inner values, when confronted with moral dilemmas in their practice (ibid: 300-302).

The two studies cited above focus on formal teacher training programmes, which made use of critical reflection and dialogues in promoting teachers' professional learning. Could such free space for reflection and discourse be created in nonformal professional learning? Showers and Joyce (1996) observe that when teachers co-planed their teaching and shared their experiences with their peer coaches, they practised new curriculum and instructional techniques and strategies more frequently than those teachers who had to work on their own to hone such skills. Feiman-Nemser (2003: 27-29) cautions that there could be two different scenarios in which beginning teachers find themselves. Whereas their initial professional learning can be strengthened when supported through interactions with and feedback from their mentors and peer-coaches, it can also be undermined when their learning needs are not recognized.

The common themes arising from the above-discussed studies are that practitioners can make the best of professional learning –
   (a) when they are engaged in critical reflection upon their practice,
   (b) when they are supported by peer-coaches and mentors through collaboration and collective discourse and
   (c) when their specific learning needs are fully recognized and addressed by their mentor or peer-coach and when they are provided with timely feedback on performance.

These themes appear to support theories of professional learning.

Data analysis
   Below is a critical examination of Min's experiences of professional learning as a new educational developer and the experiences of Angela and Tina in facilitating Min's learning. Codified names are used when referring to people involved in these experiences (see Introduction). For ease of presentation, we loosely follow a chorological sequence of the experiences in question.

(1) Overview of Min's in-kind support tasks
   In our in-kind support team, we usually set up a collaborative project (hereinafter referred to as ''project') when one or more academics (in the event of team-teaching) approach our team for

support in their curriculum or instructional design. Min was assigned to work on five such projects (see Table 1 below on next page). Since Angela closely supervised Min in all of Min's projects, her name is not mentioned in Table 1. In the discussion below, the collaborating academics are referred to as T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6 and T7; the two EDC colleagues who collaborated with Min are presented as C1 and C2. In four of the five projects, Tina, C1 and C2 are labeled as Staff B respectively. In these four projects, Min as Staff A played a major role in fulfilling the tasks related to the project in question, while colleagues who were Staff B mainly played a supporting role.

Table 2: *Min's collaboration projects and people involved*
(source: project meeting records)

Objectives of the projects	Collaborating academics	Team members Collaborating with Min	Min's role in the projects	Status of the projects
Project 1 (started in March, 2006): Supporting a law teacher in researching and writing real-life historical case study materials in law and related subjects.	T1	Tina (Staff B)	As Staff A	Ongoing
Project 2 (started in March, 2006): Supporting an academic in Art Education in developing subject outcomes and assessment criteria.	T2	Tina and C1 (Staff B)	As Staff A	Ongoing
Project 3 (started in January, 2006; Min joined in March, 2006): Supporting a team of academics in Art Education in developing and implementing assessment criteria.	T3, T4, T5	Tina and C1 (Staff B)	As Staff A	Ongoing
Project 4 (started in May, 2006): Supporting an academic in Language and Business Studies in re-designing the course plan and instructional methods of her subject	T6	C2 (Staff B)	As Staff B (the role of Staff A was reserved for a newer colleague)	Transferred to the newer colleague
Project 5 (started in May, 2006): Supporting a law teacher in re-	T7	Tina and C1 (Staff B)	As Staff A	Ongoing

orienting the focus and re-designing the instructional methods of his subjects				

(2) Min's prior knowledge, beliefs, expectations and uncertainties

Prior to taking up the job as an educational developer at the Educational Development Centre (EDC) of Hong Kong Polytechnic University (PolyU), Min finished her PhD in Education Course at a British university in 2005. She was interview for the job in January, 2006. Along with the Head of the Centre, Angela interviewed Min as the in-kind support team leader and associate Head of EDC. Examining Min's answers to the interview questions is suggestive of her prior knowledge, belief and expectations associated with the job:

A (Angela)	How would you convince the academics that you are capable of helping them?
M (Min)	I would let them know that I am specialized in Education and I am familiar with a range of innovative teaching and curriculum design strategies. And I can persuade them with my personal experience of being taught with non-conventional teaching methods in my own PhD course.
A	Our clients are academics of different departments, how is it possible that you can help them given the variety of their disciplines?
M	Well, I have good ears. I will listen to them and learn from them before giving suggestions… I can provide with my detached perspective of problems they have at hand…
H	Why did you apply for this job? What do you expect to get from it if you get it?
M	… I do hope to help students to learn effectively…The objective of the job fits my belief, I suppose

(Min's journal entry, mid-January, 2006)

Thinking back, it seems that Min was in the 'right track' as a potential educational developer in terms what she brought to the job and what she expected from it. She was also ready to face the challenges associated with it. As Min said to one of her former PhD supervisors (Min's e-mail message, 15 June, 2006):

> *'…I have to explore possibilities and pitfalls of career for myself, as you said. I desire something intellectually satisfying in my work and I want to establish professional identity for myself.'*

(3) In-kind support modeled for Min

As the team leader, Angela wasted no time in briefing Min of the objectives and nature of our in-kind support provided at the institutional, department, programme and subject levels. In addition, to help Min gain fuller understanding of how the outcome-based approach was applied in curriculum and instructional design, Angela took Min to a number of workshops that she delivered for academics. In the mean while, Angela designated Tina and other colleagues to gather for Min the reports on their own collaboration projects. As Tina reflected:

> *When Angela announced that a new colleague called Min would report her duty in less than one month, she asked us to prepare the case [collaborative project] reports and other relevant materials of the projects that we have been doing, so that the new colleague can have a glance at what we have done...*
> (Tina's journal entry, 29 August, 2006)

'We' in Tina's note refers to the three 'old' team members, including Tina herself. C2, one of these 'old colleagues', volunteered to take Min along to a meeting with his client (collaborating academic), in which Min was able to observe how they discussed ideas and planned future actions (Min's journal entry, 10 March, 2006). Such supportive attitude of fellow educational developers reassured Min that help was within her reach whenever it was needed (Min's journal entry, 7 August, 2006).

(4) More than just free lunchtime sandwiches and cakes
As the team leader and Min's mentor, Angela strongly encouraged Min to take part in the numerous lunchtime workshops and short courses offered by EDC, which were targeted at the teaching academics of the university. Of course, there were always free sandwiches and cakes for participants of the workshops and courses, but Min surely gained more than just those. Not only could Min learn about the teaching and assessment strategies/methods within the context of our university, but she captured the concerns of the new academics about the difficulty in applying such strategies and methods. For example, when participating the course Introduction to University Teaching, Min learned that some academics found it hard to implement the 'idealistic' 'active classroom' strategies in their subjects (Min's journal entry, 24 August, 2006). Such insider-knowledge about the academics' concerns has been indispensable for Min's in-kind support practice.

(5) Working as the 'Staff A'
> *After several meetings [see item (3) above], Min started working on several tasks assigned by Angela. Meanwhile, we exchanged ideas and for every draft she made, she will solicit my comments and feedback...*
> (Tina's journal entry, 29 August, 2006)

As described earlier, Min was designated as Staff A in four of the five collaborative projects that she was engaged with. Although this 'Staff A + Staff B' pattern as a means of supporting the new staff came into use in late June, it emerged as early as the time when Tina was paired up by Angela with Min to collaborate in Projects 1, 2 and 3 in March (see Table 1). Working as Staff A meant that Min had the opportunity of working shoulder by shoulder with Staff B in identifying the major problems or issues involved in the project, probing into the possible reasons that caused the issues, formulating solutions to the issues and then discussing these with the collaborating academic(s). At the same time, Angela offered Min close supervision through discussion of the tasks. Thus, Angela and Tina became Min's mentor and peer-coach in fulfilling these collaborative tasks.

We use Projects 1 and 4 as examples to illustrate how the Staff A + Staff B pattern operated in facilitating Min to gain professional competences. Started in March, 2006 as a new project, Project 1 was an excellent learning opportunity for Min at the beginning of her practice. The

tasks involved were straightforward, though they required careful thinking and some experimentation; Min could follow its whole process in order to 'discover' the sorts of tasks involved at its different stages. The working process of Project 1 is show in Figure 1 below (source: Project 1 meeting records and associated documents):
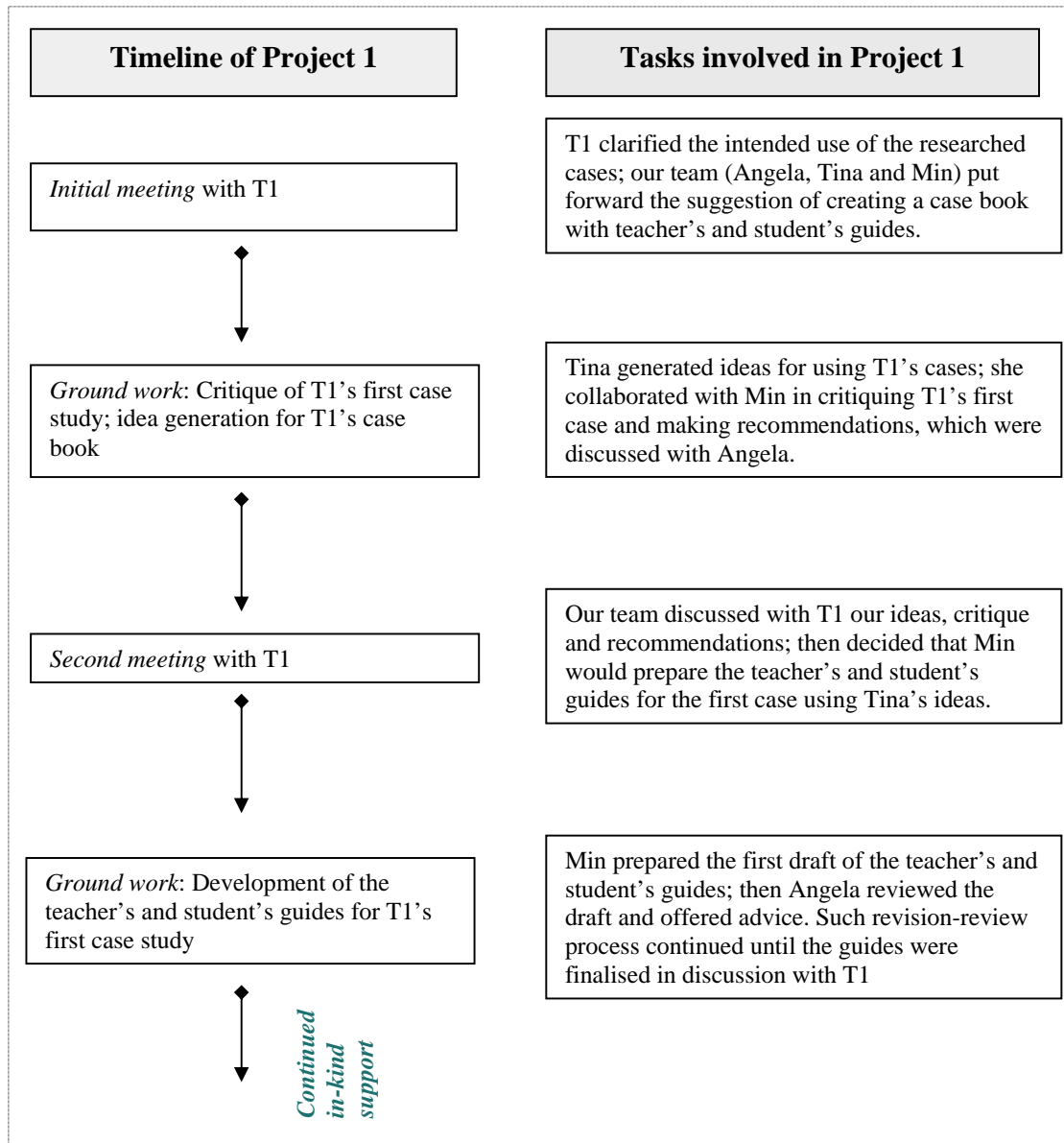
Timeline of Project 1	**Tasks involved in Project 1**
Initial meeting with T1	T1 clarified the intended use of the researched cases; our team (Angela, Tina and Min) put forward the suggestion of creating a case book with teacher's and student's guides.
Ground work: Critique of T1's first case study; idea generation for T1's case book	Tina generated ideas for using T1's cases; she collaborated with Min in critiquing T1's first case and making recommendations, which were discussed with Angela.
Second meeting with T1	Our team discussed with T1 our ideas, critique and recommendations; then decided that Min would prepare the teacher's and student's guides for the first case using Tina's ideas.
Ground work: Development of the teacher's and student's guides for T1's first case study	Min prepared the first draft of the teacher's and student's guides; then Angela reviewed the draft and offered advice. Such revision-review process continued until the guides were finalised in discussion with T1

Continued in-kind support

Figure 1: *the working process of Project 1*

Figure 1 illustrates how Angela and Tina took Min through the different stages:
  Stage 1 – probing or diagnosing the collaborating academic's in-kind support needs and suggest preliminary solutions
  Stage 2 – generating ideas related to the solutions and experiment with them in the team

Stage 3 - further discussing the solutions with the collaborating academic
Stage 4 – further improving the solutions and implementing the solutions
(In most of our projects, there is also a Stage 5 – evaluating the instructional intervention, if any; but this is not applicable to this project being considered.)

The experience of working on Project 4 had an educative value for Min in terms of her approach to the collaborative academic T6 and to her curriculum/instructional design problems (Min's journal entries, 22 July - 9 August, 2006). In Project 4, Min was the 'actual Staff A' before the 'newer colleague' arrived in August, 2006 (see Table 1). It was through the discussions with C2 and interactions with T6 that Min gradually became conscious of the necessity of adapting our 'ideal' teaching/assessment design to T6's own practical instructional concerns, such as her own work load and students' preference for group work (meeting record of Project 4, 12 July, 2006). It was also through such discussions that Min gradually grasped useful strategies/methods of addressing academic's issues (Min's journal entry, 21 July, 2006). The strategy was to gain thorough understanding of the issues that the collaborating academic had through:

(a) Analysing programme and subject documents for identifying any *incoherence* of the academic's subject relative to the programme and any *misalignments* between the learning outcomes and the teaching and assessment methods of the subject or other possible problems;
(b) Exploring and fully respecting the academic's concerns;
(c) When necessary, obtaining the students' perspectives of the issues using focus group interviewing with students.

These concrete experiences gained on the job were of both ethical and practical values for Min's practice. Although it was not easy for Min to give up her 'ideal' design for the academic's subject at first, Angela resolved Min's doubts by emphasising that the collaborating academic's concern deserved serious consideration and that we should focus on supporting rather than dominating the academic's instructional and curriculum design (Min's journal entry, 4 August, 2006).

(6) Small talks, but 'big' ideas

Everyday conversations among us afforded Min with the chance of talking about our in-kind support practice while engaging in a kind of reflective discourse. The example below would serve to illustrate how such seemingly 'small talks' may convey important messages:

I remember that when the three of us, Angela, Tina and I were chatting [on our way back from a meeting with T3, T4 and T5] about Tina's secret for being versatile in generating ideas [about implementing the assessment criteria in the subject], Tina reflected that she simply had to think from the perspective of the students learning the subject, which is seeking empathy with the students [see Fung et al., 2005: 20-26], to search widely on the web and in the library for good practice in teaching the subject or a similar one (reading and searching widely), and to constantly remind herself not to be limited by existing teaching and assessment methods used in similar subjects (which is lateral thinking) [see Fung et al., 2005: 66-67]. Then we realised that her first and last 'secrets' have both being borrowed from T3 and her colleagues' textbook designed for their subject. Thus, a fourth

secret that I might learn from Tina would be: quick to learn from others and to apply the new learning in practice.

(Min's journal entry, 7 August, 2006)

Indeed, Tina's 'secrets' for versatile ideas of problem-solving in our in-kind support revealed for Min the practical working knowledge and ethics that we need as educational developers:
  (a) professional commitment – working hard by engaging in ground work;
  (b) practical thinking strategy - empathising and lateral thinking;
  (c) modesty and curiosity – gaining insights from the academics and the literature.

These ideas were also emphasized by Angela to Min in a number of occasions when discussing with Min her projects. Yet, the ideas seemed to leave more impression on Min when articulated in our casual conversation.

(7) A learning curve can be a window of seeing

For a new practitioner, 'uncertainties' would not be a strange word. At times, Min had to taste the bitterness of failure, because no one could substitute herself in such experiences. We present in Figure 2 (see next page) the story told by Min about her learning curve at an experience-sharing meeting in our team (abbreviation of Min's handout for team meeting, 11 August, 2006).

Min's learning curve

Case: Project 2
Issues: developing subject outcomes and assessment criteria

Phase 1: identifying and diagnosing of issues

What is involved? Examining subject document and related examples/literature related to the subject in art and design education
Uncertainty: what should be the focus in this phase?
Min's approach: diligently looking at everything in the document…
Lesson learned (based on Angela's advice): …focus on the validity of the [learning] outcomes
Subsequent action: worked with Angela and Tina in identifying problems with subject outcomes –
Result: Tina and I found the PPR model used in an art assessment project…

Phase 2: revising outcomes

Uncertainty: everything I had to practise in this phase!
Situational difficulty: T2 was too busy to be available for meetings, so I started to try it out without consulting her opinion about the PPR thing
Min's approach: abandoned the original subject outcomes all together, and wrote a set of outcomes using the PPR model…
Angela's approach to diagnosis of Min's products:
[Angela] did not give directly her own comments, but 'interviewed' a young art student about her views..; result was that the young art student did not feel mine was acceptable because it did not sound like something to do with art!
Blow and maximised uncertainty: then what about PPR and what about the hard work done, and how to proceed?
Responses from Rosanna: accepted our suggestion of using PPR…
Subsequent action: C1 revised the outcomes – often worked together with me and Angela
Result: now the three of us are relatively satisfied after several rounds of revision of the drafts
to be continued...☺且聽下回分解

Figure 2: *Min's learning curve*

In her story, Min eventually overcame the hurdle of frustration with the support from Angela, Tina and other colleagues. Angela suggested that Min and C1 could apply Tina's 'old trick' and invite T2 to comment on sample student works (meeting records and summary of Project 2). By capturing the key words used in T2's own comments, we were able to use T2's own language of art and design in developing the learning outcomes and criteria. Additionally, we also availed ourselves to the insights gained through collaboration among ourselves and with T2, T3 and T4 of Project 3 in developing the assessment criteria for another art and design subject (adapted from Min's journal notes, 9th August, 2006):

(a) In *preparing* for the writing of criteria, it is essential to:
✓ Closely observe and analyse past students' work at different levels of the particular criterion in question in order to grasp the *differentiating qualities of the levels respectively*.

(b) In *writing* the descriptors, the following DO and DON'T rules are essential:
✓ Do focus on clearly stating the *critical differentiating qualities* of main aspects of student work rather than focusing on the range of details of such aspects.
✓ Don't use words that are empty and that seek to *quantify* the quality of student work at the different levels.

As such, the working knowledge constructed and accumulated through the collaboration among us and with the collaborating academics is of great value to Min's learning in her initial practice.

(8) Becoming a confident educational developer

Having gradually accumulated her in-kind support skills through on-the-job experiences and reflection on such experiences, Min appeared to be more confident when working on Project 5 (Min's journal entry, 3 August, 2006; meeting records and documents of Project 4). The project presented our team with two-fold challenges. First, the collaborating academic T7 was experienced in legal education research, which meant that he might be more critical of our recommendations than other academics would. Further, although T7 was doubtful about the effectiveness of teaching solely with lectures and assessing solely with examinations, he was nevertheless hesitant to replace these approaches to teaching and assessment because of their dominance among law teachers. In our successful attempt to persuade T7 to try out the active learning approach in his teaching, we availed ourselves to:

(a) Our existing knowledge of teaching and learning;
(b) Literature in legal education for non-lawyers searched by Tina and Min;
(c) Exemplary group case discussion activities prepared by Min.

As this recent experience shows, having gained considerable insights into and operative knowledge and skills of our in-kind support practice, Min is becoming much more mature in her professional role.

Discussion of findings

As a new practitioner in educational development, Min's professional learning was a process of learning through collaboration with colleagues and through critical reflections upon her on-

the-job experience. Moreover, Min's own reflexivity played an important role in her learning - it was through her critical reflection on her own successes and failures and on others' experiences and feedbacks that she gradually increased her practical and ethical knowledge (see the previous section). In this sense, our experiences as the new practitioner, the mentor and the peer-coach respectively coincide with the themes arising from the literature of professional learning discussed earlier.

When examining the facilitation of professional learning and growth of a new practitioner in educational development in relation to our own experiences, we took into consideration both the specific educational context of our university and the nature of educational development practice itself. In light of our local experiential knowledge gained thereby, we would argue that this self-study contributes to some extent to the understanding of new educational developers' professional learning needs and the facilitation required for such learning to take place. We summarise below Min's learning needs as a new practitioner and the range of facilitation methods adopted in facilitating her learning.

1. As a new educational developer, Min had the following professional learning needs:
   a. The need to understand the context of in-kind support practice at our university in association with the collaborating academics' concerns and needs;
   b. The need to understand the nature and objectives of our in-kind support practice;
   c. The need to become familiar with the teaching and assessment approaches encouraged by our university's teaching and learning policies;
   d. The need to build up the knowledge about and methods/skills for approaching the collaborating academics and addressing their curriculum/instructional design problems.
2. The facilitative methods for Min's professional learning included:
   a. Orientation:
       At the beginning of her educational development practice, introduce to Min the nature, objectives and methods of our practice through two orientation methods:
       ✓ Briefing Min of the nature and objective of the in-kind support practice;
       ✓ Modeling effective in-kind support practice for Min so that she could learn from observing how fellow educational developers worked with collaborating academics and on their problems;
       ✓ Encouraging Min to participate in workshops and short courses on teaching and assessment methods to familiarise her with these methods and with academics' concerns in implementing the methods;
   b. Peer-coaching:
       Following the initial orientation, pairing up Min with Tina (and later on with C1 and C2 respectively), an experienced educational developer, as her *peer-coach* to cooperate as Staff A and Staff B and fulfil in-kind support tasks;
   c. Mentoring:
       Angela, the team leader and a very experienced educational developer, performed the *mentor*'s role, which involves both direct collaborating with Min and providing Min with frequent verbal/written feedback on her performance and difficulties/concerns;
   d. Experience sharing conversations and team meeting sessions:

Use everyday conversations and team meetings as vehicles of sharing with Min useful working strategies/skills and sensitive ethical considerations associated with in-kind support practice.

Although the methods of mentoring and peer-coaching were of an emergent and evolving nature in our experience, they appeared to be the most effective methods of facilitation; and they formed the core part of the other two methods. This is because the successful use of the other methods depended to a great extent on the effort made by Angela and Tina (and other experienced educational developers) in patiently helping Min when she was encountered with uncertainties and difficulties in connection with her in-kind support tasks. In turn, it appeared that the effectiveness of mentoring and peer-coaching was greatly enhanced by arranging Min to collaborate with colleagues in concrete in-kind support tasks, particularly with the mentor (Angela) and the peer-coach (Tina). Through collaboration, Min was provided with ample opportunities of participating in reflective dialogues and eliciting useful tips from colleagues as well as their constructive feedback on her performance.

Concluding remarks

In this paper, we first introduced the key research questions as well as the purposes of the self-study. Then we examined self-study as a methodology guiding our continuous collection and analysis of qualitative data arising from our everyday practice. Following that, we reviewed the literature of professional learning and the facilitation of professional learning for educational practitioners. The research yielded themes that are congruent with those found in the literature and other themes that are specific to a new educational developer's professional learning and its facilitation relevant to our lived experiences. Important themes emerging from this self-study are that not only should the new educational developer be self-reflective and proactive in pursuing professional learning and constructing personal meanings about the profession, but her/his learning should be adequately supported through concrete applicable methods, particularly mentoring and peer-coaching.

Min entered the profession of educational development with the ideal to help students to learn effectively, a belief that is also shared by Angela and Tina, the other two authors. Simple as it is, this belief is the very origin of Min's heart. It is this simple belief that encouraged Min to continue with her learning to become an effective member of the community of educational development, supported by fellow educational developers. To conclude this paper, we would share with the readers the following words from one of us, Tina (Ko, 2006: preface):

"当艺术家遇上了挫折或矛盾的相峙,往往会回到心灵的发源处,寻找最初的简洁与悸动。" - Tina Ko (2006: Preface)

"When confronted with frustration and tension, The artist returns over and over to the origin of her heart, searching for the first ever simplicity and thrill." (Translation)

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