ICED 2020 proceedings:

How we are cultivating future-ready graduates in Japan: Issues and expectations emerging from SoTL research at Teikyo University

Fumiko Inoue[1]

Center for Teaching and Learning, Teikyo University
359 Otsuka, Hachioji
Tokyo, Japan

Takashi Yasuoka[2]

Center for Teaching and Learning, Teikyo University
359 Otsuka, Hachioji
Tokyo, Japan

Susan C. Eliason[3]

Center for Teaching and Learning, Brigham Young University
3800 HBLL
Provo, Utah, U.S.A.

Abstract

Ever since faculty development became a required element of higher education in Japan, numerous initiatives have emerged to improve teaching at the organizational and individual levels (2020). However, little focus has been placed on supporting or accelerating regular classroom improvement undertaken independently by individual teachers. Further, we observe that the burden of publicizing the results of their undertakings and sharing them with instructors who face similar problems still remains with the teachers themselves.

Since 2017, the Center for Teaching and Learning at Teikyo University has implemented the SoTL Project, which supports educational research conducted by faculty members on their own classes. A post-project survey completed by participants revealed that many felt their SoTL efforts were very significant.

1   Introduction

The Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Teikyo University was established in 2011 with the mission of promoting educational development across the entire university. Currently the Center employs 11 specialists working in four departments: educational research, institutional research, pedagogical research support, and teaching Japanese writing. In 2017, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Project was introduced to support educational research conducted by faculty members on their own classes.

---

[1] inoue@main.teikyo-u.ac.jp
[2] yasuoka@main.teikyo-u.ac.jp
[3] susan_eliason@byu.edu

The SoTL Project aims to implement the educational ideals of Teikyo University and support research activities related to individual teachers who contribute to the development of teaching activities designed around the student perspective. The driving forces behind SoTL are twofold: first, the need for interest and problem awareness among individual teachers with regard to their own classes (so that they can actively and independently work to improve them); and, second, the hope that individual knowledge about teaching and learning can be developed into organizational knowledge through the disclosure of research results via oral presentations and the submission of research papers. This is congruous with the concept of creating organizational knowledge (Nonaka,1996; Senge, 2011) related to teaching and learning (Inoue, 2014), which aligns with the purpose of the Center for Teaching and Learning (Figure 1).
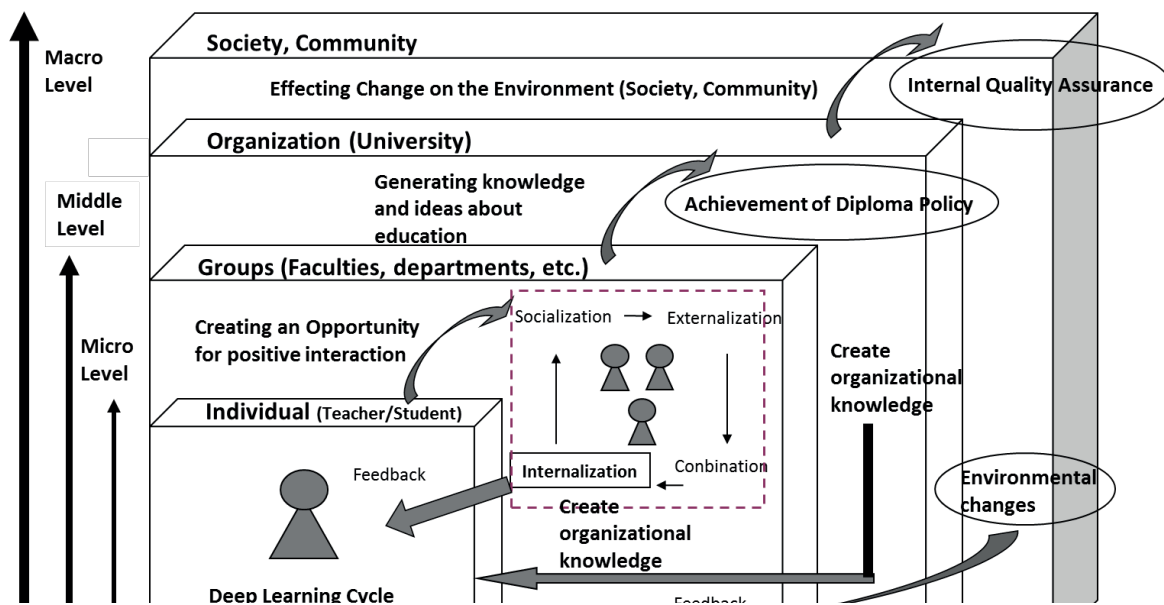

Figure 1: Concept of building organizational knowledge related to teaching and learning (Inoue, 2014)

2   Overview of the SoTL Project at Teikyo University

The SoTL Project is generally undertaken for a period of one year, during which participants ("delegates") are provided with a research grant. Research delegates are obligated to provide oral presentations at interim and final briefing sessions and to submit research papers for the Center for Teaching and Learning bulletin. Not surprisingly, the SoTL Project is designated as one of the criteria used to evaluate the teaching performance of selected participants at Teikyo University.

As of 2020, a total of 31 individuals (research delegates only) have participated in the project. Over four years, a majority of research themes were related to "designing, implementing, and evaluating active-learning classrooms" and "designing, implementing, and evaluating classrooms that utilize Information Communication Technology (ICT)." From the shift to student-centric education in recent years, we observed that instructors are highly interested in developing active-learning lessons and utilizing ICT in the classroom.

3   Post-project survey results

Let us look at the post-project survey results for 2018 and 2019, in which teachers who had taken part in SoTL activities were asked how they felt about their experiences. The surveys were conducted by both paper questionnaire and Web survey, and the valid response rate was 100 percent for both years (eight people in 2018 and eleven in 2019).

Respondents were asked to select multiple-choice answers and write reasons for their selections with regard to seven items: (Q1) significance of SoTL activities; (Q2) significance of participation in the SoTL community; (Q3) ways by which SoTL activities were shared with others; (Q4) usefulness of support provided by the CTL; (Q5) desire to continue with SoTL; (Q6) necessary training for SoTL activities; and (Q7) other. Due to space constraints, we will consider here only the responses to Questions 1, 3, and 6.

Regarding Question 1 about the significance of their SoTL activities, almost all participants responded that they were "Very Significant" (eight in 2018 and eight in 2019) or "Somewhat Significant" (three in 2019) (Figure 2). Reasons for those answers included "I thought it was significant that I was able to leave behind explicit knowledge in the form of my research results by treating my classroom activities as subjects of study"; "This job can be a solitary one in some ways, so I felt this was a great opportunity not only to learn and gain awareness about a variety of things, but also to rekindle my passion and motivation toward my work"; and "I was able to systematically organize the experience I've gained through actual classroom teaching."
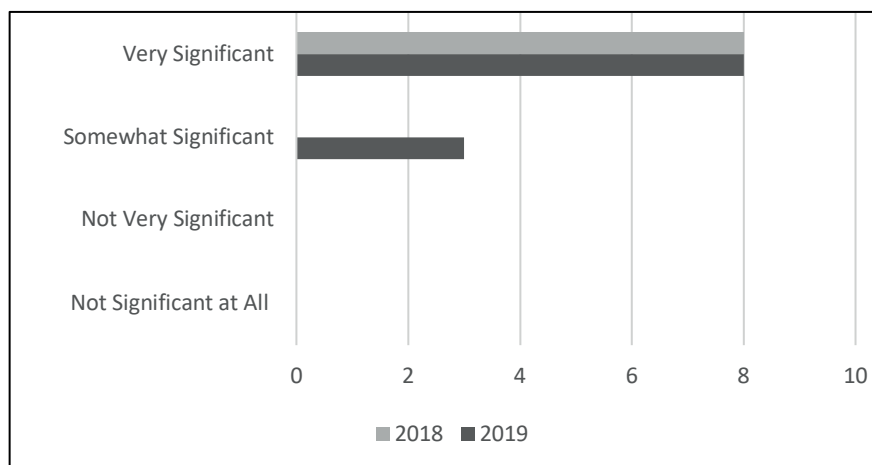

Figure 2: Significance of SoTL activities

Regarding Question 3 about how participants shared their SoTL activities with others, "chatting with colleagues" had the most responses (six people in 2018 and six in 2019), followed by "conversations with other SoTL Project participants" (four people in 2018 and four in 2019) and "conversations with colleagues at departmental meetings, etc." (five people in 2018 and three in 2019). We saw relatively few responses to "submissions to academic journals or bulletins (other than the Teikyo-CTL bulletin)" (one in 2018 and one in 2019) and "presentation at an external academic conference, etc." (four in 2018 and one in 2019), indicating that the disclosure and sharing of activities is limited to colleagues and other participants in the SoTL Project (Figure 3).
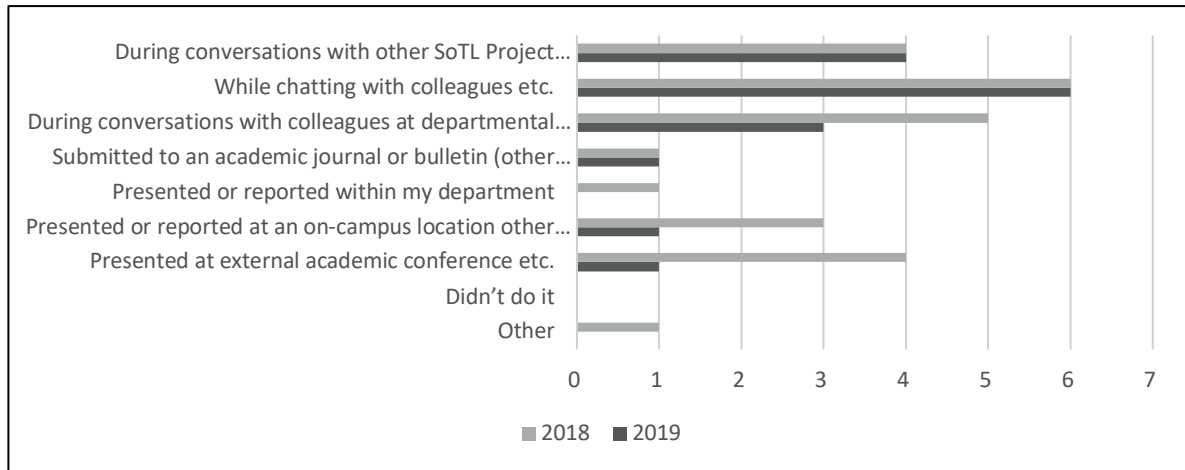
Figure 3: Methods of sharing SoTL activities with others

Regarding Question 6 about the training needed for SoTL activities, quite a few faculty responded to "survey design and analysis" (three in 2018 and five in 2019), "multidisciplinary techniques for educational research" (four in 2018 and four in 2019), and "evaluating research" (four in 2018 and three in 2019). These responses indicate that participants feel the need to know more about the techniques used in educational research and survey design and that they are interested in how to assess their own SoTL activities (Figure 4).
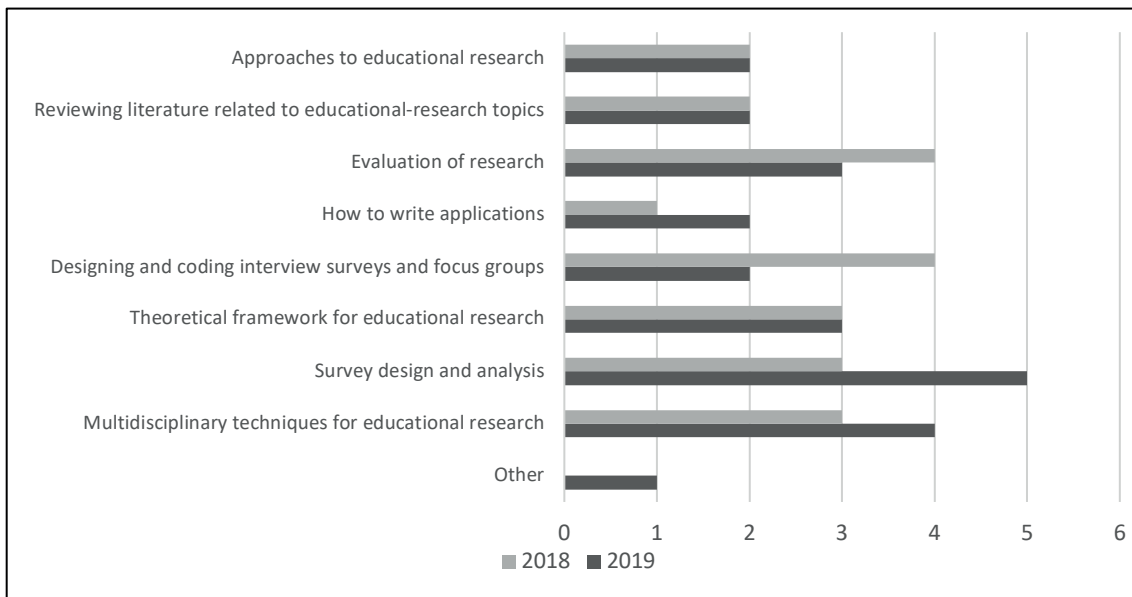

Figure 4: Training needed for SoTL activities

4   Conclusion and suggestions

From the post-project surveys completed by participants, we saw that virtually all teachers considered their SoTL efforts to be very significant. However, they tended to share the results of those activities through informal conversations with co-workers and other participants in the SoTL Project; very few shared by presenting their experiences orally at academic conferences or by submitting research papers. Presumably, this is due to the lack of a common awareness enabling university professors in Japan to see their own classrooms as potential subjects of

research and to accept the idea that the study of teaching is a natural thing for university faculty members to engage in.

In addition to continuing our efforts to promote SoTL within Japan, we intend to study which sorts of organizational and support systems can be constructed to effectively popularize SoTL among university professors.

Acknowledgments

References

University Subcommittee of the Central Council for Education (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology). Management of Teaching and Learning Guidelines. January 22, 2020.

Inoue, Fumiko (2014). Soshikiteki FD Katsudō to "Gakushū Suru Soshiki" no Kōchiku (Organizational Faculty Development and Construction of Learning Organization), *Journal of Japan Association for College and University Education,* 36(1), 100-103.

Nonaka, Ikujiro and Hirotaka Takeuchi (1996). *Chishiki Sōzō Kigyō (The Knowledge-Creating Company)*, Tokyo: Toyo Keizai Inc..

Peter, M. Senge (2011). Gakushū Suru Soshiki: Shisutemu Shikō de Mirai o Sōzō Suru (The Fifth Discipline： The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization), Translated by Junko Edahiro et al., Tokyo: Eiji Press.