Classroom Practice and Teacher Cognition

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Lessons from the Classroom

Edited by

Nicholas Bradley

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-0364-1467-2
ISBN (Ebook): 978-1-0364-1468-9

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CONTRIBUTORS

Nicholas Bradley is an associate professor within the Department of British and American Studies at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. He is also the Director of the Core English Program and Manager of the ELT Teacher Team. In addition to professional development, he is interested in conceptualisations of culture in classroom practice, teacher training and language pedagogy.

Mina Hirano has been teaching as an EFL lecturer at Japanese universities since 2016 and had been teaching at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies for five years by the time this research ended. She holds an MA in Linguistic Science (English Education) and a BA in British and American Studies from Nanzan University. Her research interests are scaffolding, learner autonomy, and intercultural communication.

Taylor Meizlish holds a BA in Linguistics and an MA in Linguistics: Language Teaching Specialisation. His interest is in developing students' pragmatic competence by applying the insights of Linguistics and Pragmatics to the EFL classroom. He currently teaches at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies.

Di Mi, a lecturer at the Foreign Language College of Tianjin Normal University, China, graduated from the Chinese University of Hong Kong with an MA in Linguistics. Her interests lie in teaching English for general purposes and developing students' intercultural competence via collaborative online international learning.

Wang Jun Amy Lin has dedicated the past ten years to teaching English in Japan, covering from K-12 education through university level, and currently serves as a full-time lecturer at Nagoya City University. She earned her MS in TESOL from California State University, Fullerton. As an immigrant with experience living in Taiwan, the US, and Japan, her research focuses on intercultural communication, critical pedagogy, identity, empowerment, and multiculturalism.

Kevin Ottoson is a lecturer at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies. He holds an EdD from the University of New England. His research interests include study abroad, virtual exchange, and intercultural competence.

Jared J. Peo has been teaching EFL/ESL at university level for over 9 years. His experience teaching has helped him focus his research and personal development on intercultural competence, motivation, autonomous learning, and extensive reading.

Naoya Shibata is currently teaching as an EFL lecturer at the Centre for Language Education and Development, Nagoya University of Foreign Studies (NUFS) and pursuing an EdD in TESOL at Anaheim University. He graduated from the Department of English Language Teaching and the MA in TESOL program at NUFS. His undergraduate and postgraduate experiences aroused his interests in second language writing and materials development.

Henry Troy is currently a Language Instructor at Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan. He has twelve years of experience in language teaching, and his main areas of research interest include the use of corpora in the language classroom, English language tests, and media literacy.

Andrew D. Tweed is Coordinator of the WLC Self-Access Center at Soka University in Tokyo, Japan. Previously he was a U.S. Senior English Language fellow in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where he worked as a trainer and curriculum developer. His research interests include autonomy and psychology in language learning. He holds an MA TESOL from the University of Washington and an EdD in TESOL from Anaheim University.

Jason Walters is a full-time lecturer specialising in academic writing instruction and materials development at Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, where he has led weekly professional development sessions as assistant director of the Core English program and worked as a coordinator of the university's distinctive Power-Up Tutorial. In his research, he explores positive psychology, learner autonomy, and native speakerism in EFL.

Jessica Zoni Upton has over 10 years of teaching experience and has been teaching at universities in Japan since 2015. She holds a MA degree in English Language Education from Nagoya University of Foreign Studies, and a BA in Japanese Studies from Oxford Brookes University. Her main research interests include intercultural communication and gender studies.

PREFACE

The profession of teaching is as much, if not more, about learning as it is about teaching. We as teachers never stop learning. We learn our students' names, their characteristics, information about what they like, what they do and how they are in certain situations. We learn what is best for them on their educational journey, what isn't and why. We learn to incorporate and manipulate technology to facilitate learning (our own and our students'), and we learn and adapt to the changing requirements of our institutions and wider educational context. Ultimately, teaching is a dynamic profession with multiple elements, all of which exist in a state of constant change.

Just as all the things around us are changing, we as teachers change too, though, ideally, a more accurate word would be that we evolve. My early teacher days had me bouncing around classrooms, cracking jokes, and pouring vast amounts of energy into everything. As time went on and the years accumulated, I was less able to call upon that youthful energy to drive classes along, though the desire to do so remained as strong. While my energy levels might have lessened, my experience grew and pushed my classes, my teaching, and what I could offer my students, to greater heights. Experience helps us adapt and deal with changes successfully, but experience is only part of it, and not always the answer in and of itself. As I heard a wise teacher say long ago, a 40-year teaching career can simply mean one year of experience repeated 40 times. Experience is of little value if it is simply synonymous with length of service or duration of employment. Experience helps us only when we reflect on what we do and try new things, or improve on existing practice, to better achieve the goals we want for our students and that they want for themselves.

The valuable tools of experience and reflection are hugely amplified when we join as a community of teachers. When we as teachers come together and communicate their practice, it allows us to access the experience of others, as well as existing as a further step in reflection on our own. It opens us up to a multitude of options and possibilities that we wouldn't have if we worked in isolation. This is not only clear from research and common sense, but it is something I came to learn first-hand early in my career. Having taught in different institutions, I experienced

teaching in isolation, and I experienced teaching as part of a community of educators who discussed their practice openly. The latter was far more rewarding than expected. Not only did it provide me with a much wider range of ideas and tools for teaching than I would have ever had in isolation, but it also resulted in extremely productive collaborations with colleagues which, in turn, further increased my enjoyment in teaching.

The articles in this collection are manifestations of this. All of the articles are written by authors who are both practicing English language teachers and educational researchers. The research, themes, activities, and insights are all the result of teachers striving to improve their practice and share it with their colleagues, wherever they may be. I have, professionally, grown so much by listening and sharing with teachers. Learning from our colleagues helps us professionally as well as mentally. The old proverb of "A problem shared is a problem halved" is applicable to teachers sharing to help their colleagues develop their practice, and it also serves to demonstrate that the problems we face are not a result of personal deficiency, but are issues that others have struggled to overcome too. The articles within this collection are written towards such ends and I trust that they will be taken in the spirit that they are given.

The first chapter deals directly with what I have briefly discussed in this preface on a macro level. Nicholas Bradley and Jason Walters put forward a model for continuing professional development that can be easily replicated by any institution or group of teachers to foster a culture of sharing, collaboration, and course cohesion. Professional development has become an imperative for educational institutions in recent years and the model within the chapter represents a productive and stress-free way that can easily be adopted by teaching groups of any size.

In the second chapter, Jessica Zoni Upton and Mina Hirano outline the importance of self-reflection in language learning, and present the results on research amongst students on different methods. These methods are found to have positive influences on student motivation, language abilities and autonomous learning skills, and can be easily integrated into courses.

Despite English language instruction increasingly focusing on the needs of individual learners, and allowing them the space and opportunity to personalise their learning, Henry Troy points out in the third chapter that standardised English language tests remain ubiquitous, especially as gate keepers for students wishing to gain admittance onto overseas courses or advanced work opportunities. Rather than sacrificing the more communicative and student-centred aspects of classes to coach students on

these tests, Henry Troy shows that activities that aid students in their preparations for language tests can be built into almost any course.

In Chapter 4, Taylor Meizlish calls for greater inclusion of pragmatics in English language education. To facilitate this, he outlines the process in which, with the assistance of his colleagues, he created a corpus of language based on pragmatics. This corpus not only demonstrates the wide variety and function of certain forms of speech acts, and therefore adds weight to calls for greater inclusion and recognition within English language teaching materials, but it also serves as a resource that teachers are able to construct and exploit for their own teaching.

Every teacher knows that teaching and learning do not stop and start at the classroom door. The most successful language learners are those who possess a certain level of autonomy in their language learning and engage in learning opportunities beyond the classroom. In chapter 5, Andrew Tweed examines different ways to promote autonomy both inside and outside of the classroom and provides teachers with multiple resources that they can explore and incorporate into their courses.

Chapters 6 & 7 both focus on the importance of critical thinking, an element of the profession that has received much attention, and calls for greater inclusion within language learning in recent times. In Chapter 6, Wang Jung Amy Lin assesses the importance and impact of critical thinking in language learning as well as providing clear and practical means of doing so, and students' opinions and outcomes that resulted from them. Students were found to respond positively to learning critical thinking skills in their language studies, though she cautions that the critical thinking skills included in course content must be culturally and contextually relevant and needs-based.

In the following chapter, Kevin Ottoson also considers critical thinking, but as part of wider considerations associated with institutional imperatives for greater internationalisation and the development of individuals that can thrive on the global stage. The chapter provides practical frameworks that can assist teachers who wish to, or are tasked with, increasing the international and global competence of their language students.

Chapter 8 takes a more philosophical look at language education and examines the aspects of education that are seen as most important by practicing language teachers. In the chapter, after discovering the aspects or purposes of language education that teachers collectively identify as most important, Nicholas Bradley puts these to the student body to highlight areas of commonality and divergence. While students and teachers agree that all aspects and purposes are desired and are of benefit,

profound differences can be found, particularly when it comes to critical thinking.

Chapter 9 focuses on writing instruction, particularly on establishing the strength of correlation between language learning motivation and writing motivation, both in their instrumental and integrative forms. In the chapter, Naoya Shibata highlights several findings that can guide teachers aiming to develop the motivation of their students, while reminding us that the high level of motivation some learners have for their language learning does not necessarily carry over into their writing focused classes, and vice versa. Understanding students' sub-motivation strengths can aid teachers in the development of classes and curricula.

The following two chapters both focus on collaborative online international learning (COIL), a teacher led initiative that attempts to develop a wide range of skills and positive learner characteristics through the establishment of connections with overseas language learning classrooms. In chapter 10, Kevin Ottoson outlines and provides examples of different methods of setting up and implementing a COIL initiative. In the following chapter, Di Mi presents data from both students and teachers involved in a COIL project to identify some of the challenges that may be experienced when implementing such an initiative.

Chapter 12, the final chapter, continues with the theme of online learning. Jared J. Peo's focus details a form of differentiated learning that was offered to students in a synchronous online language course. Students' perceptions and responses are presented, as are multiple take-aways. These lessons learned can inform future teacher creation of online learning environments, especially ones that hope to offer differentiated learning opportunities.

As can be seen, the chapters within this collection cover a wide range of subjects. However, all are of great relevance to the profession of language teaching as they are the direct consequence of teachers experimenting, researching, and delving deep into their practice. What they learned, the messages they bring, and the suggestions they put forward can prove as food for thought for teachers and also provide steps that can be immediately adopted and implemented as needed. Teachers helping each other with lessons learned from their own classrooms fosters an extremely positive professional culture of development. I believe that these articles will be of great interest and benefit to practicing teachers and that they may encourage them to further share and collaborate in their own immediate contexts.

1

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A MODEL FOR BUSY TEACHER TEAMS

NICHOLAS BRADLEY & JASON WALTERS

Introduction

Amidst universities' growing inclination toward adjunct hires over permanent faculty, instructors increasingly find that while academic achievements and certifications are crucial for securing contracts, they are not entirely sufficient for ensuring long-term professional success, particularly in Japan where a great many teachers work for limited terms and must regularly compete for new positions while still delivering high-quality and effective courses. To effectively address the diverse needs and challenges of students in the 21st century and to ensure future career prospects, teachers must go further, prioritising a commitment to continuous learning, adaptability, and active engagement with the broader academic community. A growing trend towards continuous professional development (PD) programs comes in response to the diverse challenges brought about by the changing educational landscape, especially given the rapidly expanding range of pedagogical modalities and digital tools. Although teachers often associate PD with attending seminars, conferences, or board-mandated teacher workdays, ongoing academic investigation into PD's goals, frameworks, best practices, and outcomes reveals opportunities for meaningful, effective, and sustained professional development efforts beyond isolated events and courses (Reynolds and Rose 2006).

While several theoretical models exist across various contexts, a universally established set of comprehensive criteria for successful PD is yet to be defined. However, the fundamental principles of these competing frameworks align closely. Borg proposes a broad understanding that extends beyond voluntary training or teacher compliance with governmental

or institutional mandates, suggesting that effective PD includes the following characteristics:

- relevance to the needs of teachers and students
- teacher involvement in content and process
- peer collaboration
- support from school leadership
- exploration of and reflection on practices and beliefs
- job-embeddedness
- contextual applicability
- critical engagement with received knowledge
- respect for teachers' knowledge and experience (Borg 2015)

These criteria correspond with Richardson & Diaz Maggioli's INSPIRE model, which advocates for PD efforts to be “impactful, needs-based, sustained, peer-collaborative, in-practice, reflective, and evaluated” (2018). Similarly, the UK Government Department of Education emphasises the importance of recursive feedback loops, peer support, structured professional dialogue among teams, and leveraging external expertise related to course content and activities. They also highlight the value of professional development schemes that are sustained over time and integrated into various aspects of teachers' roles. While the literature continues to evolve and is highly context-dependent, there is a consensus that effective PD hinges on collaboration, experimentation, and reflection (Fraser, Kennedy, Reid, and McKinney 2007; Murchan, Loxley, and Johnston 2009; Williamson and Morgan 2009).

Various sources, both internal and external to schools, criticise professional development programs. They characterise them as sequences of disjointed and decontextualised encounters where teachers passively consume knowledge produced elsewhere. These criticisms often highlight a lack of guiding principles or criteria for success (Collinson and Ono 2001; Kennedy 2005; Schwille and Dembélé 2007). Other critics cite insufficient institutional support and concerns about rivalry or self-promotion being inadvertently fostered within these programs. Drawing from the findings of a case study conducted by the authors with a large team of university EFL lecturers, this chapter will examine the possibility that PD initiatives led by individual teacher teams can satisfactorily address many of these criticisms. They provide a constructive exploration of how collaborative and internally managed PD programs have potential to effectively assuage these concerns, and emphasises their potential to

drive continuous improvement without imposing extensive commitments of time or external resources.

Strengths of Teacher-Led PD Initiatives

The primary strength of PD programs initiated and led by individual teacher teams (as opposed to being imposed by external entities, such as oversight committees or emerging half-formed from bureaucratic structures) lies in their ability to be customised to address situational needs. This approach results in a continuous, adaptable, and, in a sense, democratic program that markedly enhances teachers' competence.

That teacher-led PD may provide significant advantages is not a recent discovery. A substantial body of literature predates the contemporary emphasis on formalised PD programs in education, acknowledging the strengths associated with grassroots, or "bottom-up," PD. Numerous articles from this earlier period offer insights and recommendations for the establishment of such initiatives (Frost and Durrant 2002; Eddy 2007; Podhorsky and Fisher 2007; Rosson, Dunlap, Isenhour, and Carroll 2007). Given the substantial existing endorsement, it is surprising that the recent surge in PD initiatives by educational institutions has not drawn more from the foundational body of work advocating for teacher-led PD that preceded it.

However, amidst this broader trend, recent efforts, such as a case study conducted at a university in Hong Kong, serve as noteworthy examples of a positive shift (Lim, Yang, and Gao 2021). This study, focusing on a "grassroots" PD approach, assesses its effectiveness in enhancing the understanding and proficiency of blended learning techniques among members of a small faculty. This internally managed program had the intended outcome of improving faculty members' blended learning techniques; furthermore, it allowed the team to recognise and address deficiencies in the PD program itself. This iterative process ultimately led to a wider objective of scaling up the program for adoption and broader customisation by other faculties and teaching groups. Other team-led PD programs across various disciplines have returned similar outcomes (Aithal and Aithal 2023; Lambirth, Cabral, McDonald, Philpott, Brett, and Magaji 2021; Simiyu, Bwire, and Ondigi 2021).

As teacher-led PD continues to demonstrate positive outcomes and program scalability, it is essential to look beyond indicators of well-organised programs and explore the profound real-life impact these initiatives have on individual teachers working in a demanding profession. Examining specific impacts experienced by educators—those connected with relationships, autonomy, achievement, and belonging, and career growth—within these initiatives offers a richer understanding of the

substantive effects of teacher-led PD on those we lead and work with.

Strengthening Communities of Practice

Examining the human aspect within often impersonal and one-size-fits-all institutional requirements, we are encouraged by the positive feedback loops and improved working relationships found within the collaborative learning environments nurtured by team-led PD. Here, participants actively partake in peer collaboration, sharing insights and best practices. Recognising the benefits associated with building a community of practice through ongoing professional development activities, many researchers leading and participating in these programs have initiated various studies exploring these advantages.

Illustrating the positive outcomes of collaborative PD, Picower (2015) conducted a study that sheds light on the transformative impact of providing teacher teams with a community characterised by camaraderie and professionalism. In this supportive environment, teachers reported heightened reflection on their teaching practices and expressed gratitude for increased opportunities to discuss challenges and successes with their colleagues. Participants also demonstrated greater content knowledge relevant to their courses as well as increased familiarity with resources and pedagogical tools. Moreover, the study highlighted within the team members' reports that they had gained not only motivation and energy, but also a boost in confidence, propelling them to autonomously continue their professional development efforts beyond the confines of the program.

PD that fosters camaraderie and collaboration is not a one-way street. Rather than being a unilateral process, leveraging the existing professional and interpersonal connections among team members can significantly contribute to a program's overall efficacy (Coria-Navia and Moncrieff 2021). These improved working relationships act as a conduit for feedback, creating a secure environment for openly examining both challenges and opportunities for improvement within the program. Thus, the collaborative atmosphere, coupled with trust, initiates a powerful feedback loop that not only enhances the overall program but also fortifies the community of practice, sustaining growth and mutual support.

PD and Reflective Practice

The promotion of reflective practices has become an integral component of PD, and raising awareness of the benefits of continuous reflection within a collaborative setting can inspire participants to comfortably adopt a critical approach to scrutinising their instructional methods, ultimately elevating their teaching efficacy. Scholars have underscored the pivotal

connection between reflective practice and teachers' professional development, particularly within teams operating in the TESOL field (Cirocki & Farrelly 2016; Farrell 2015). The iterative nature of reflection necessitates sustained PD efforts, with "one-shot" seminars, workshops, or institutional events falling short in providing teams with the means for continuous and cyclical reflective practice. By way of example, one study conducted at a private school in Lebanon demonstrated the efficacy of an in-house professional development program. This initiative offered structured opportunities for collaborative reflective practice. It successfully fostered the teachers' capacity for self-appraisal and improved their reported satisfaction with their classroom performance, while also illuminating the need for greater alignment between the perspective and perceptions of the participants and their institutional leadership (Shabeeb and Akkary 2013). By incorporating reflective practice, PD can extend beyond the examination of individual teaching methods and career growth within teacher teams—it should facilitate a collective and recursive process that encourages teachers, not only to reflect on their own practices, but to critically assess and enhance the PD program itself. Adopting a collaborative, team-based approach to ongoing PD allows for more comprehensive reflection that can contribute to the program's flexibility, while empowering participants to iterate upon it for greater effectiveness.

Potential for Continuous Improvement

In the dynamic landscape of professional development in education, diverse perceptions abound regarding best practices, while the body of research on establishing and managing "grassroots" or peer-led ongoing PD programs remains relatively limited. Moreover, PD programs are often perceived as demanding a significant outlay of time, resources, or both. Despite these challenges, a well-managed, team-led faculty development program has the potential to initiate positive feedback loops. This drives participants to enhance their individual teaching competencies, building collegial working environments to help give a sense of belonging within the larger academic community, and a greater awareness of future career opportunities. Improved teaching practices and confidence leads to heightened student learning outcomes while bolstering overall student satisfaction. This positive experience further motivates faculty members to continue their development efforts, creating a cycle of continuous improvement. Consequently, this chapter will address the aforementioned concerns with PD and explore how an effective, collaborative, and job-embedded program can be achieved without necessitating an extensive commitment of time or external resources.

Implementation of a Successful PD System

Institutional Context

At the time of implementation, there were no specific PD requirements placed on staff by the higher educational institution, though a weekly "teacher meeting" of unspecified format and content, held at a regular time each week, was mandated. The development of PD into the structure, that will be described below, began in this time slot as an initiative actioned by the ELT Teacher Manager (hereafter referred to as "the manager"), based on identified needs among the group, classroom practice, and course implementation. The teacher cohort for whom the PD system was implemented was made up of eighteen English language teachers of various nationalities, ethnicities, and native languages. Over the time the PD framework was implemented and developed, a total of 32 teachers have been involved within it. All possessed a master's degree or higher and had been teaching English for between 3-20 years. The teachers were located in two offices of nine teachers each. Despite sharing several courses, there was very little interaction between the two offices prior to implementation.

Rationale

As highlighted by the recent literature on effective PD, any framework that is put in place must be founded on the specific needs and desired educational outcomes of the learners, teachers, and institution. Upon taking up position as coordinator for teachers and the major English learning program, the manager spent several months attending the mandated teacher meetings, speaking one-to-one with teachers about meeting outcomes, and teaching the English language classes that were taught by all. From these, the following issues were identified:

Table 1.
Issues Identified by the Manager

Poor Group Dynamics	Presence of cliques
	Isolated teachers
	Lack of collaboration
Lack of Shared Direction	Working towards different ends
	Uncoordinated courses
	No view of best practice
Negativity	Minimal appreciation for colleagues
	Feeling of lack of recognition of own abilities
	Pessimism concerning future prospects

The issues identified above are applicable to most educational situations in most contexts where a large group of teachers with equal authority are simply left to teach, yet have minimal guidance and no framework within which to structure their activities, nor to gain or request guidance and feedback. With these issues being discovered, a PD system with specific goals was formulated. These goals were articulated as four main positive areas to develop, rather than the above negatives to overcome. The goals listed in Table 2 below were those to be developed directly in the PD sessions while goals with an asterisk* are seen as areas that will be achieved indirectly and outside of the sessions, yet still as a consequence of the ongoing implementation of the PD structure.

Table 2.
Goals of PD

1.	Positive Group Dynamics	Recognition of colleagues' talents and abilities and exposure of own talents and abilities to others Identification of self as a member of a team of skilled teachers Increased collaboration and mutual respect*
2.	Classroom Practice and Course Cohesion	Sharing of materials, activities, best practice, techniques, etc. Formulation of shared course direction and outcomes
3.	Engagement with the Professional Community	Active involvement with professional organisations* Increased output and quality of presentations, articles*
4.	Positive Workplace & Career Progression	Increased job satisfaction* Continuing career opportunities*

While the first two main goals will be of relevance to all educational contexts, the latter two are of particular importance to teachers in the Japanese higher educational context where employment norms place staff on fixed term contracts, at the end of which they must secure another contract at a different institution. The only way to avoid this employment merry-go-round is to find a permanent position, which are in very limited supply. As such, the latter two goals improve teachers' connections and CV while also potentially having a positive effect on the first two goals.

Implementation

The process from fact-finding and needs assessment to the PD sessions in their current form can be said to progress through 4 main steps. The stages are shown in Table 3 and will be explained in detail below.

Table 3.

Steps in Implementing PD in its Current Form

Step 1 – Fact-Finding and Needs Analysis
Step 2 – Introducing the Structure
Step 3 – Expansion
Step 4 - Automaticity

Step 1 – Fact-Finding and Needs Analysis

The manager operated an open-door policy, spoke to members individually and attended the teacher meetings in each of the two offices. This was done to gain the thoughts of teachers and assess the group dynamics, duration of meetings, mood, and subjects covered. In addition to the issues highlighted in the rationale above, the meetings were found to be extremely short and unstructured. Some teachers amongst the group who felt dissatisfied with the meeting outcomes were reluctant to try to change things due to a lack of authority and an unwillingness to appear to be forcing their peers.

Step 2 – Introducing the Structure

From the findings of Step 1, a simple structure was implemented by the manager consecutively in both office meetings and featured the following elements:

1. Manager gives notices and reminders on institutional administrative issues, events, etc.
2. Discussion of class procedure and outcomes in shared English courses.
3. Discussion and sharing of plans for the upcoming week of classes.
4. Open floor time (teachers can raise anything they wish).
5. Teachers break into groups based on smaller shared courses to reflect on, discuss, and share the past and upcoming week's classes.

When announcing the structure, the manager justified the change by appealing to the teachers' own development, the potentially positive impact on classes and student attainment, and by highlighting institutional requirements. More specifically, the structure was presented as offering

teachers a means by which to develop their teaching toolkit and save time in class preparation through the sharing of best practice, but also that the courses are coordinated courses, so the institution requires that teaching, outcomes and methods be aligned.

After several meetings, the structure became understood and accepted, and the meetings themselves began to proceed smoothly. Once this was achieved, the manager unified both meetings into one larger meeting of all 18 teachers. Despite the change in location and the increase in members, the familiarity of the structure and clearly understanding the purpose and value of the meetings allowed for the unified meeting to be implemented without issue.

Step 3 – Expansion

With the unified meeting progressing smoothly on a weekly basis, the manager later introduced a new element to the structure which was termed "PD". For this new element, the manager gave the following brief:

> Each academic year, each teacher will bring something to the group for the purposes of professional development. This element of the session should last at least 30 minutes. The content of the session is to be decided by the teacher but it should be something that is relevant to the profession and/or the practice of their colleagues. For example, suitable subjects might include an activity in a shared course that was particularly successful, highlighting a problem or issue you found in classes, detailing it and starting a discussion aimed at finding solutions, a dry run of a presentation you will give at an education conference or other event, a report on a conference/article/research, a review of a new program or technology that can assist language education.

Teachers selected their date from the semester calendar with the first month of slots being taken by the manager. By doing this, the manager aimed to model what was expected in terms of subject, format, and investment, but also to show that the work required was not demanding and that the scope allowed their own expertise and interests to be accommodated. Additionally, by taking the first month of slots, the manager also aimed to demonstrate his belief in the value of the new element of the structure and provide time for it to become accepted. Following this, teachers began to lead sessions, with all teachers being the lead once an academic year. The subjects selected by the teachers all had relevance to the profession of English language teaching, as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4.
Teacher Selected PD Subjects in 2023/4 Academic Year

Semester 1	Semester 2
Strategic Interactions	Developing Materials for Listening Comprehension
Gamification	Students in the Grey Area
Using Diagrams in Lessons	Supporting Low-Level Students while Challenging High-Level Students
Study Abroad Programs	Using Rubrics & Review of McKeachie's Teaching Tips
Imaginary Dialogues	A.I. Tools for Teachers
Using Kahoot in the Classroom	Student-Led Feedback
Differentiation	Foreign Language Anxiety
Pronunciation Activities	The Effectiveness of Theme-Based Instruction on Students' Global Awareness
Encouraging Students Outside of the Classroom	Students' Perceptions of Grammar Instruction
The Importance of Self-Studying	Timed Conversation Preparation Sheet
Investigation of Pronunciation Activities in Japan.	

Step 4 – Automaticity
With the PD meetings and the new "PD" element progressing over several months, the meetings progressed smoothly. With the manager noting that the teachers appeared to accept the necessity and value of meetings, the manager desired to maximise teacher involvement and investment by reducing what he perceived to be the remaining, if very minor, impediment: institutional oversight. With the meetings proceeding smoothly, the manager appointed two senior teachers (one located in each office) to lead the meetings as Chair on a rotating basis. Though the manager still led occasional sessions, with this change, the vast majority of meetings became entirely teacher led, determined, guided and based on their needs, thoughts and desires.

Outcomes

The following sections will showcase the findings of a small-scale study that was conducted among the 32 teachers who had been part of the PD framework, detailed above, during the time of its implementation. Of the 32 teachers, 28 responded to the survey and 6 were invited to interview

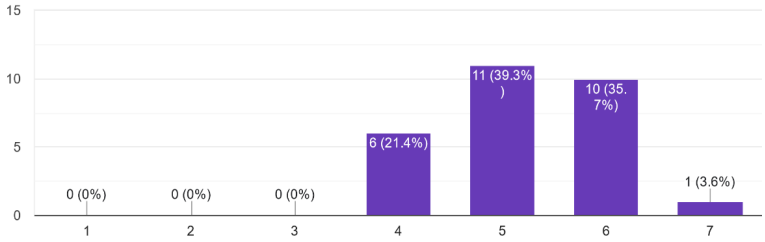
from among those who volunteered to participate further. The majority of participants were no longer teaching within the institution, and several had relocated overseas.

Classroom Practice

In the examination of lecturers' teaching practices, a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7 was utilised, with 5 to 7 and 3 to 1 denoting increasingly positive and negative impacts, respectively, and an answer of 4 indicating "no noticeable impact" or "I don't know." Notably, 82.1% of lecturers reported the PD sessions having positive impact on the types of activities they were able to use in class (Fig.1, below). Overall, 78.6% of respondents perceived a positive impact on their classroom practices, attributing it to increased activity variety and exposure to new teaching ideas through their peers' presentations, discussions, and reflections (see Fig. 2, following page).

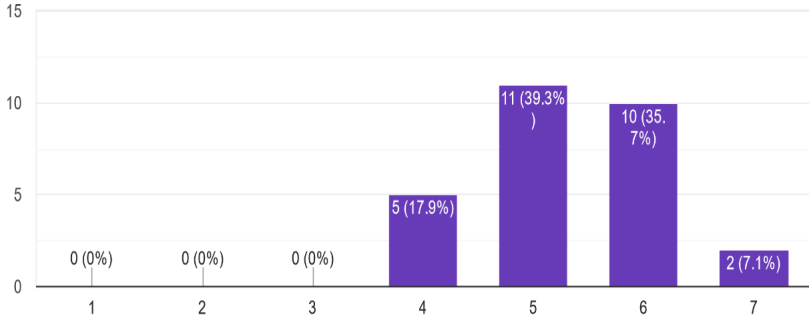
Figure 1.

Teachers' reported impressions of PD impact on overall classroom practice.



Analysis of lecturer comments pointed to a largely positive experience with the program. Many teachers commended the PD for its efficacy in fostering collaboration and building a more cohesive language program. One lecturer noted that the PD "definitely helped me with new ideas for the class and towards making improvements with what I already do." Positive feedback also highlighted the value of observing colleagues, with one lecturer stating that it was "interesting and helpful to see how other lecturers implemented activities and to see how they were using different technology in the classroom."

Figure 2.
Lecturers' reported impressions of PD impact on variety of classroom activities.



Of particular significance was a comment regarding classroom management that emphasised the PD's positive impact on confidence and self-efficacy. The lecturer acknowledged that learning about shared challenges among colleagues reassured them by challenging the notion that they faced their struggles in isolation.

> In my experience, one of the most positive effects … on my classroom practice has been learning that most of my colleagues have/had similar issues with classroom management. [I]t reassured me to know that it wasn't necessarily something that I was doing wrong, and at the same time I could learn what others had been doing and try it in my own classrooms.

This insight not only affirmed the lecturer's own experience and offered meaningful validation from peers' perspectives, but also underscores the significance of a PD program that thrives on active contributions from its participants, rather than being dictated by entities detached from the daily realities of educators. This approach ensures the continued relevance of topics, procedures, and materials, aligning them closely with teachers' practical needs and experiences.

Professional Culture and Teambuilding

The most overwhelmingly positive survey responses were evident across survey items exploring the team's professional culture, indicating highly favourable outcomes pertaining to the participants' cooperation, collaboration, and interpersonal dynamics. Notably, the program was

reported to have substantially enhanced the recognition of colleagues' abilities, talents, and efforts, fostering a more cohesive and supportive work environment.

Before the PD program's introduction, participants expressed uncertainties about their own skills, strengths, and teaching identities. Fortunately, the program appears to have helped to provide lecturers with a clearer understanding of themselves and their roles within the team. Through the ongoing PD, they were able to gradually cultivate mutual respect as well as strengthened professional relationships, leading to increased collaboration and a more open exchange of ideas.

> I have found some sessions to be extremely informative about the type of teachers and researchers some of my colleagues are, and it has strengthened our professional relationship by collaborating or simply sharing ideas on the topic outside of the professional development sessions.

In interviews, lecturers also cited improved social relationships among colleagues and a sense that the team had successfully overcome previous interpersonal challenges, with one participant noting that "[the group dynamic] wasn't great before … and it generally got better as time went on, and maybe that [was] also reflected in more comfortable PD," indicating that the increasingly more collaborative and collegial atmosphere encouraged by the program resulted in a positive feedback loop that in turn helped to improve the atmosphere of weekly PD sessions.

Lecturers' comments further reflected the positive influence of the PD program on professional culture. One participant highlighted how the program provided opportunities to discover colleagues' fields of interest, facilitating collaborations on shared interests.

> If I had a similar interest, then we were able to get together and discuss our common interests and maybe collaborate on a presentation/paper together. It was also interesting to hear lecturers talk about areas which I was not familiar with and to keep up to date with some of the latest innovations in TEFL.

Another emphasised the informative nature of the sessions, stating that it "strengthened [their] professional relationships" through collaborative efforts and idea-sharing outside the formal development sessions.

Despite these positive outcomes, a subset of participants disclosed a potentially less favourable impression; some perceived a lack of full

engagement from their peers, noting “I think some see the professional development as a task rather than an opportunity and, therefore, it is not always treated with the same level of professionalism.” Additionally, some felt that the PD sessions were occasionally used for self-promotion or to unfairly assess colleagues. “[some] judged each other [or] used the platform to brag about publications,” wrote one lecturer.

A well-designed PD program should, at minimum, emphasise a collective commitment to professional growth and encourage participants to view it as an opportunity for shared learning and development. Nevertheless, the implementation of clear guidelines and expectations can further cultivate peer support by mitigating individualistic behaviours that may hinder the program's primary objectives. Despite some negative experiences, the overwhelmingly positive
responses regarding improved relationships and peer recognition (see Figs. 3 & 4 below), collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and professionalism serve as compelling evidence of the program's success.

Figure 3.
Lecturers’ reported impressions of PD impact on professional relationships with colleagues.

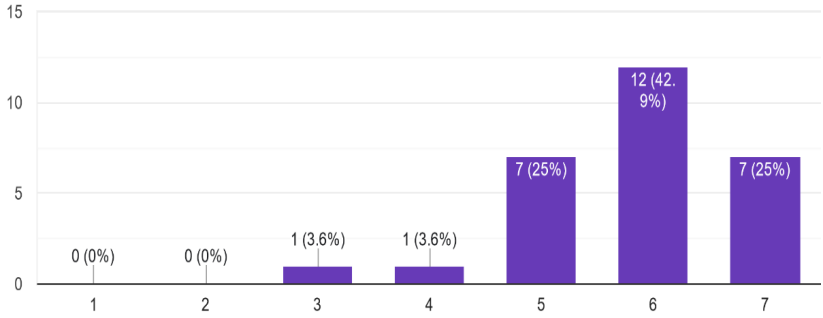
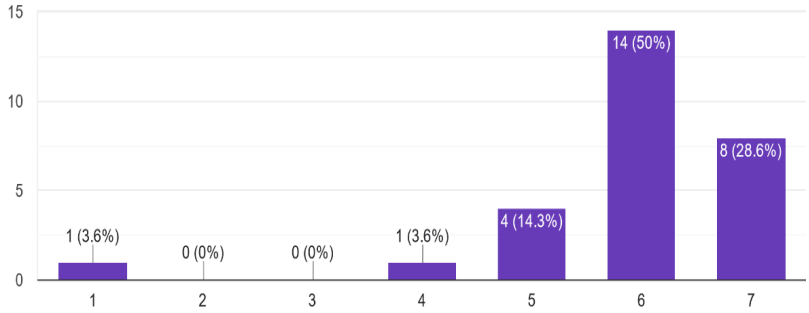
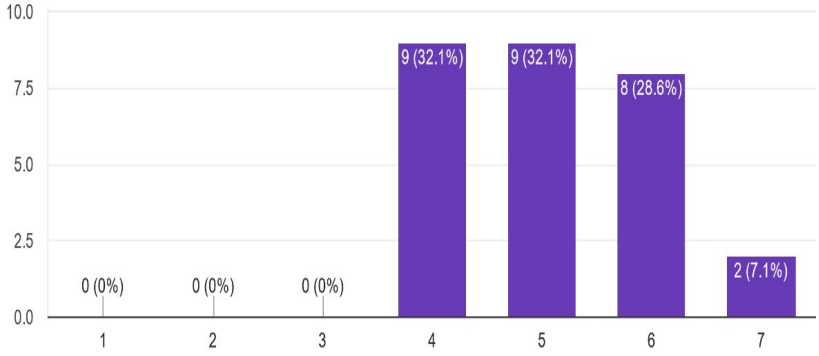


Figure 4.
Lecturers' reported impressions of PD impact on recognition of peers' abilities, talents, and efforts.



Belonging and the Academic Community
The following section explores the impact of the PD program on lecturers' sense of belonging, involvement in the wider academic community, and their attitudes toward academic participation, research activities, and other scholarly contributions.

Figure 5.
Lecturers' reported impressions of PD impact on their involvement with the professional community.



As depicted in Figure 5 (above), the response to PD was positive, albeit not as strongly positive as was seen in the responses related to professional culture. Although PD generated enthusiasm for conference

participation and supported an increased focus on publishing, presenting, and attending events, it was not seen as having a substantial influence on the quality of teachers' output.

Figure 6.
Comparison between lecturers' reported interest in publishing research (left) and perceptions of the quality of their written work (right).

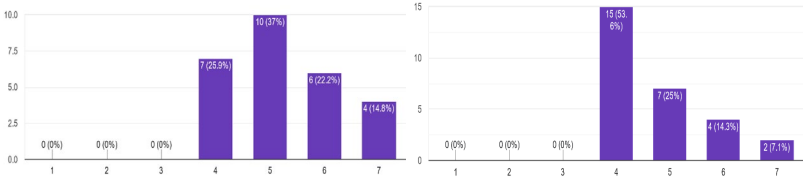


Figure 6 compares responses to questions regarding "interest in publishing research" and "quality of written work," revealing a significant gap between the two. While 74% of teachers expressed interest in publishing research, only 42% felt that PD contributed to improving their written output. These observations suggest that PD stimulates interest in academic pursuits but may not necessarily translate into improvements in the final products.

However, PD positively shaped lecturers' presentation skills by providing additional practice opportunities for public speaking, allowing them to rehearse research talks and pilot teacher workshop activities in advance of conference appearances. Teacher responses indicate a favourable effect on their interest in presenting, conducting research, writing papers, and identifying themselves as authentic members of the broader professional community. Comments, such as "I used to see the field as out of my reach, but I now feel confident that I have a place and can do it as much as anyone else," and "The PDs helped me prepare for events and offered a place to share what I learned from conferences and workshops. Most of my writing improved through writing, not the PD," help to define the extent of the PD's positive influence in this area.

Career Growth

As previously mentioned, university lecturers in Japan commonly operate under limited-term contracts with predetermined end dates—this program's participants included. The landscape for lateral career moves remains competitive, and opportunities for upward advancement are not only competitive but scarce as well. Given these conditions, the PD program

aimed to assist lecturers in cultivating skills, enhancing their CVs, and acquiring qualifications to better position themselves for their next career steps—that is, the emphasis was not only on immediate benefits to their classroom practice but also on equipping them to navigate the challenging terrain of academia in Japan. This section discusses the participants' responses regarding their perspectives on career growth and advancement, the perceived value of this style of PD initiative, and their inclination towards replicating or initiating similar programs in future workplaces.

A majority of lecturers (85.2%) perceived a positive influence on their career progression through participation in the program. Most respondents indicated a “slightly positive” impact, underscoring its beneficial effect on career prospects for nearly 9 out of 10 teachers. Additionally, 77.7% reported increased job satisfaction, a crucial aspect that contributes to previously mentioned, mutually beneficial, positive feedback loops driving more autonomous skill development and learning.

During interviews, one teacher supported implementing PD sessions at any educational institution, highlighting the valuable learning opportunities offered by peers and the impetus for skill development that emerges from mutually respectful collaboration and professional exchange. However, this teacher also suggested a less frequent schedule for the PD sessions, and another noted that “when [sessions] become routine and mandatory, they start to lose their appeal.”

Another teacher expressed unambiguously positive sentiments, stating that PD had only a positive impact, highlighting the “supportive environment,” shared interests in teaching and research, and curiosity about each other's work were highlighted. The teacher expressed a desire for more extended and frequent sessions, indicating a recognition of the benefits and resources provided by PD for current teaching responsibilities and future career growth.

These quotes highlight a common thread in discussions about PD, where perceptions of specific aspects vary among teachers. A feature that one teacher perceives as problematic may be viewed by another as a strong positive. This phenomenon underscores the intricate nature of diverse experiences and perspectives among participants and helps us to recognise the importance of regularly “checking in” with all participants to compensate for personal blind spots and more comprehensively evaluate the form and structure of the program over time.

Further Evidence

The positive findings through both teacher surveys and interviews are also supported by a great deal of further evidence, both statistical and anecdotal. In terms of further statistical evidence, the percentage of the academic articles in the university journal authored by the teacher group involved in the PD meetings, has increased significantly over the period from which the various stages were implemented. As shown in Table 5, the number of articles increased from Step 1 of implementation in 2016, and then exponentially increased following the implementation of Step 4 in 2018. This increased further in 2022, where nearly one-third of articles were authored by the teacher team involved in the PD meetings, despite the institution having a teaching population and eligible author pool numbering in the hundreds.

Table 5.
University Journal Articles Authored by ELT Teachers

Year	Number of articles written by ELT teacher team	Total number of articles published in the journals	Percentage of journal articles originating from ELT teacher team (%)
2022	10	32	31.25
2021	7	33	21.21
2020	9	34	26.47
2019	8	46	17.39
2018	**6**	**38**	**15.79**
2017	4	26	15.38
2016	**2**	**32**	**6.25**
2015	0	32	0
2014	0	30	0
2013	1	29	3.45
2012	0	33	0

A number of the articles submitted by the teachers were either written in collaboration with another teacher, based on joint research, or both. This increased collaboration, that is attested to by the results outlined in the previous section, was clearly visible and present in other forms. Though statistics are not available to quantify it precisely, the manager noted a great increase in the number of teachers attending conferences together, giving presentations at conferences together, conducting research