

Developing Language Teachers to Their Full Potential—Training and Opportunities

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Abstract—To develop language teachers' potentials, we can start from understanding and appreciating their talents which should be refined and shared among colleagues. Then cooperative development can be achieved through collaborative learning and peer observation. Training and monitoring are also needed to reinforce professional growth.

Index Terms—full potential, collaboration, training, professional development

Staff development is to bring about changes in teachers' instructional practices, students' learning outcomes and teachers' beliefs and attitudes, which requires us educational leaders to provide and facilitate as much opportunities and training as we can to develop our staff to their full potential. Actively using every valuable chance of formal and informal training programs is the first step for every staff to be their best selves.

I. KNOWLEDGE OF TEACHERS' STRENGTHS

In the same way that individual learners have different ways of learning at their best, we teachers each have our own, individual ways of being the best teacher that we can be. Each individual is unique and has distinctive talent. Therefore, the first step in developing the potential in others is to understand and appreciate these talents. Then cultivate these talents by providing inspiration, support and opportunities to teachers as they work toward refining and sharing their strengths.

A very important and effective way of helping the staff recognize their own strengths is providing opportunity for the individual to reflect or self-evaluate. This can take many forms, such as formal evaluation forms, professional portfolios, peer observation, interest group. A good evaluation form, which includes most of the important ingredients for effective teaching and professional development, will be a guide for the staff to their future grow and full play of their potential.

II. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Collaborative learning is designed to build collegiality among teachers to prevent isolation from one another so that they can share common problems and collective solutions. Teachers can develop collaboration relationship through interchanging with one another within the informal system of the school and college. Collaboration naturally complements autonomy. Freedom to direct one's own learning is a vital aspect of collaboration. Collegial groups must be flexible in their composition and purpose. They must form and disintegrate based on the needs of individual teachers. And it is teachers who must decide on the specifics of their collaboration.

Participation in cooperative collegial groups can expand teachers' levels of expertise by supplying a source of intellectual provocation and new ideas. A collaborative group can furnish the emotional support and encouragement teachers need to cope with the risk that is inherently involved in learning to teach well. Colleagues can demonstrate to one another that they value attempts at growth and reassure group members that the effort and pain are worth it.

A. Cooperative Development

Fortunately I had a chance to attend Julian Edge's workshops on teacher development at Macquarie University, Sydney. Co-operative Development offers an accessible but disciplined framework which teachers can use to draw on their own experience and understanding of their own situation. It is a style of interaction designed to allow two teachers to collaborate on furthering the ideas and plans of one of the pair. As such, it offers a practical way of working towards the widely accepted goal of autonomous development.

Attentive listening is the way to effective communication, to better solutions and to facilitating staff grow as well. We can encourage each other's professional development by learning to talk and listen to each other in a way that allow us to take the whole idea of evaluation (along with the exchange of comments, opinions, suggestions and advice) out of the equation altogether for an agreed period of time. This allows the person who needs sounding board the extra space in which to work on their own development in a way that facilitates the growth of their own ideas, while also encouraging an increase in collegial feeling among the language teachers involved.

B. Peer Observation

I always believe that even the finest teachers can still learn. Observing is a kind of exciting for me. As a vice-dean of the college, I greatly enjoy visiting other teachers' classrooms. Peer observation of teaching is of growing importance in higher education both for purposes of assessment and development.

Peer observation gives teachers an opportunity to learn from each other in a non-threatening environment. Observing other teachers' teaching can give us new ideas for our own teaching and illustrate techniques we might never have thought of on our own. Being observed by others from the committee and from the department also can give us ideas about how the class looks from the student's perspective, and about things we might try in order to increase the effectiveness of our teaching.

III. COACHING AND MONITORING

Teachers need training, follow-up and technical assistance provided by respected persons. They also need ongoing coaching and feedback by credible persons. Such training activities as seminars, workshops and conferences on the campus or off the campus are the most popular, in which diagnosing and prescribing, giving information and demonstrating, discussing application, practicing and giving feedback will be major parts. Apart from these formal activities, we can stimulate and reinforce teachers' professional growth through informal but focused communication and monitoring.

A. *Seed Planting*

Some positive facts or data on/off the campus can be used to introduce a new idea or concept to raise teachers' interest. For example, we can say: "I happened to be in someone's classroom the other day and I saw the most wonderful Cooperative Learning activity taking place. The students were so engaged in..." Teachers who use cooperative learning will feel reinforced and probably think I was talking about them. Teachers who have never heard of cooperative learning now at least have a seed planted regarding the terminology.

Informing teachers of all kinds of professional opportunities, such as situations, courses, lectures, books, language teachers and all manner of other things that will help them grow, through emails and announcements—providing bit of information about a program or encouraging a teacher's professional interests—are ways in which, through relatively small actions, can exert incremental influence on their teachers' development.

B. *Motivating*

Staff members will be pleased if their professional growth interest is appreciated. Disseminating professional and curriculum materials—duplicated and distributed articles, hands out curriculum materials, lend books to individual teachers and set up displays for their faculties in central locations—personal one-to-one follow-up seems to have a positive influence on teachers' responses to the activities.

Conversational inquiries soliciting teachers' opinions about a display or an article may have increased the impact of the disseminated materials by promoting teachers exposure to them. If the teachers have not read them, we can summarize some of the ideas or provide some questions. Some teachers, apparently motivated by the questions, will read the articles and then express their opinions.

C. *Encouragement*

You can never give too much encouragement. One of the key points in staff development is to convey support for the staffs in general attention as well as in informal conversation, which can guide and encourage language teachers to stretch them from their current reality towards their potential. Teachers in turn willing to experiment with new or innovative tech because they feel their dean is supportive and would not penalize them for experiments that failed. Any time when one learns something new and is excited about it, I'm really open to hearing about it, and trying it out if they want, e.g. try new textbooks. The attitude of the dean is crucial factor in the willingness of the staff to pursue new ideas and programs—opportunities for both personal and professional growth.

We are never too old to hear praise. Working very hard to find something positive as often as possible will be positive reinforcement which is a valuable tool for a change not only in the praised, but also in the others. What's more, it is also a powerful tool that can be good for the praiser, who will find it easier to help language teachers reach their full potentials. We should keep in mind that since language teachers are more pleased with compliments that are not glaringly obvious, we should praise something specific, that is, praise the language teachers for what they do, rather than what they are.

D. *Recognizing*

One way to help individual staff members to grow is to understand, appreciate and utilize their strengths. If we can recognize teachers' positive efforts with specific recognition, we can help them see specific areas of value. For example, acknowledging that a teacher did an effective job of using questioning skills during a class period that you dropped in to in informally observation can help reinforce this teaching style. At the same time, this kind of authentic praise will have impact on other teachers or can arouse their interest.

We can recognize individual teacher's achievements by publicizing teachers' successes by talking about them to parents, other teachers and other higher leaders. Also encourage teachers to seek info/assistance from successful

colleagues, which provide opportunities not only for instructional improvement, but also for increased self-esteem for the teachers whose special work was being recognized.

Most of us find ourselves in a position to help others achieve more of their potential than we realize. Sure, as leaders, we must be well qualified to help our staff reach their potential. I believe it is part of our purpose to serve others in this way—to encourage and support language teachers we care about in becoming their best selves.

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