

## Summary/Commentary

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### Session Title: Best Practices for Sustainable In-House Professional Development

Digital Presence: <http://tinyurl.com/k9bzeos>

Presenters: Ian Nichols, University of Pennsylvania; and Maureen Templeman, University of South Florida

Content Area: Teacher Development

Session Type: Practice-Oriented

### Summary

This presentation was about creating the infrastructure for sustainable in-house professional development. It started with barriers to professional development and then sketched out an infrastructure that could sustain professional development.

#### *Five Barriers to Effective Professional Development Experience*

The five barriers to an effective professional development experience are application, location, missed opportunity, processing the information, and forgetfulness. The following questions were used to help the presenters address the barriers and create their professional development program at their institutions. The presenters suggested that different programs can use these questions in their efforts to sustain in-house professional development.

- *Application*: How can we encourage and monitor application of new professional development concepts and skills?
- *Location*: What is the best location for professional development materials?
- *Missed Opportunity*: What if a person misses a professional development opportunity?
- *Processing the Information*: How does a person organize and digest so much information?
- *Forgetfulness*: What if a person forgets everything before being able to apply it?

#### *Best Practices for Sustainable Professional Development*

The presenters offered five best practices for sustainable professional development. They are listed below.

1. Pre- and post-workshop activities
  - a. The IEP can have a faculty development day where classes are canceled. A survey can be created to find out what instructors want and need. Faculty can also state one or more goals on the survey. There can also be a post workshop survey to follow up on if the workshop was helpful and if the faculty members were able to implement ideas from the workshop or accomplish goals.
  - b. *Issue*: Who would be the one to create the surveys?
2. Faculty learning communities
 

Faculty learning communities are small groups of faculty members who come together to discuss an article, book, or idea. Five suggestions were given to facilitate the faculty learning communities.

  - a. Set specific goals.
  - b. Set duration. (How long will the learning community meet for?)
  - c. Set regular meetings.
  - d. Focus on collaboration and accountability.
  - e. An issue was uneven interest and participation. Not everyone will have the same desire to explore the topic of discussion.
3. Shared storage space
 

Presenters offered five points to consider when thinking about storage space for any video, audio, images, or written materials that come from professional development activities.

- a. Google Drive, Dropbox, Local Networks
  - b. Types of Information: Videos, PowerPoints presentations, articles, etc.
  - c. *Issue*: Someone needs to manage the storage space and be responsible for recording, archiving, updating, etc.
  - d. *Issue*: Levels of access. Who gets access and who does not
  - e. *Issue*: Privacy laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
4. Flipped model
    - a. Faculty can review videos or read articles before workshops or professional development activities.
    - b. Develop teacher training materials/teacher demos.
  5. Course managers/Program coordinators
    - a. Course managers or coordinators can affect the course by modifying the materials. They create the course syllabi and have textbook choice and control over many in-class and homework activities. They also create assessments.
    - b. *Issue*: Compensation.
    - c. *Duties*: Communication with teachers, presenters at workshops, committees, and administrators.
    - d. *Barrier*: Absent course manager. If a course manager is not performing his/her duties, instruction can suffer.

### Commentary

Since the presentation was mostly about infrastructure relevant to sustaining in-house professional development, not many professional development activities were suggested. However, the presentation helped me think more deeply about professional development at the AEC. The presentation inspired me to come up with a definition of professional development and related concepts as well as suggest our e-journal, *Issues in Language Instruction (ILI)*, as a way AEC faculty can sustain professional development.

#### *Definition and Discussion of Professional Development and Related Activities*

The Applied English Center has a “longstanding effort to promote the professional development of AEC faculty and staff” and will fund “professional development activities” (AEC Faculty Handbook 2013-2014, p. 76). Opportunities for professional development listed in the Faculty Handbook include conferences, workshops, webinars, KU courses, IT workshops, Center for Teaching Excellence workshops, attendance and volunteer opportunities at Mid-TESOL, TESOL International, and NAFSA (pp. 76-77). We also have a growing library and an in-house e-journal devoted to capturing how we practice and interpret TESL at the University of Kansas. Although there is much opportunity at the AEC, there appears to be no definition of professional development.

The following is an initial attempt at defining professional development at the AEC.

*Professional development at the AEC is rooted in the practice of TESL at the University of Kansas and consists of any advancement that is beyond or different from an individual’s current knowledge or ability as an ESL professional.*

The University of Kansas makes a distinction between professional development and research. The distinction can be illustrated in the titles of offices of KU upper administration. We have a Vice Chancellor for Research<sup>1</sup> and Vice Provost for Faculty Development.<sup>2</sup> If the university makes this distinction, we too can explore the distinction within the context of the AEC. My definition of professional development refers to advancements the individual makes in his/her knowledge or ability. In contrast, I refer to research as advancements in the field that an individual or team makes. The distinction is between the individual and the field. Research, then, includes professional development but professional development is a wider concept and does not necessarily include research. An individual can engage in both research activities, which

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.news.ku.edu/2014/03/31/steve-warren-step-down-vice-chancellor-research-ku>

<sup>2</sup> <http://facultydevelopment.ku.edu/>

advance the field, and professional development activities, which may be well-known in the field but new to the individual.

The AEC also has a category called Research and Development or R&D. This category seems to overlap with professional development and research. Because of the overlap, I explored a possible distinction among (1) research, (2) professional development, and (3) R&D within the context of the AEC. Based on my understanding of how R&D has been typically interpreted at the AEC, R&D is more about the creation of materials and other products that may or may not advance the individual's knowledge or the profession itself. In this sense, R&D can be considered *creation* rather than *advancement* per se. This does not mean R&D cannot lead to professional development and advancement of the field. Creation of materials, for example, not only facilitates instruction but can also lead to professional development for individual instructors and, at its best, can lead to advancements in the field.

#### *Caution*

The definition of professional development should refer to practicing TESL at the University of Kansas and be interpreted as connecting new knowledge and abilities with practice. Faculty members engaged in professional development (or research or R&D) should make this connection obvious. One caution, however, needs to be made. By defining professional development, we necessarily set parameters around what gets acknowledged and what does not. Someone or some committee will have to make decisions about what is relevant to the AEC and what is not. All decision makers must remain ferociously open-minded to understanding the relevance of different kinds of professional development activities to the practice of TESL at the University of Kansas. For example, two years ago researching corporate models of TESL would have been considered peripheral at best to practicing TESL at the University of Kansas. In light of KU's new corporate partnership with Shorelight, that kind of "peripheral" research is now directly relevant to TESL at KU. Professional development policy must allow our faculty the academic space to develop, explore, and identify wide ranges of ideas and trends in the profession because these ideas and trends may even end up at our university.

#### *Issues in Language Instruction (ILI)*

One way for AEC instructors to continue to develop professionally is to contribute to our e-journal, *Issues in Language Instruction at the AEC*. This journal is devoted to sharing ideas and capturing tacit knowledge faculty members accumulate with experience. Contributions can be written or in interview form. The content of the contributions is open to all professional ESL-related activities and interests of the instructors. Ideas published in *ILI* can lead to presentations and publications in other journals.

#### **Conclusion**

Professional development needs to be an on-going activity. The field will pass us by if we stop developing as individual professionals. By not contributing to the profession (research), we become less relevant to organizations such as TESOL and MIDTESOL. When we stop creating (R&D), we water down instruction and conform to generic ESL textbooks and materials that publishers target to the widest audience possible. We can certainly make a good argument for professional development, but it is a struggle to sustain. To lessen this struggle, we need to find ways for professional development to emerge naturally from our teaching, faculty meetings, and other professional interactions. Initiated by the presentation I attended, suggestions in this commentary simply contribute to the discussion.

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