

CHAPTER 13: EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES: A PROPOSAL

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1. Introduction

The current century is characterized by speed and influx of mass information. In the midst of mountains of knowledge constructed, transferred and reached by many with a simple click on any keyboard, nothing stands still. Heraclitus of Ephesus envisioned constancy of ephemeral state of the mundane world ages ago by stating ‘...the only permanent is change...’. Whether it be a simple change of a bus schedule in a residential area or a curricular innovation initiated by the management in a school, we are facing changes in our daily or professional lives and going through adaptive processes accordingly. To this end, it is not going to be a hypothetical argument if we propose that only the professions and those professionals who stand the test of ‘professional development’ (PD henceforth) can survive. That being said, regardless of profession, professional development is no longer a luxury, but a must. PD is crucial in all walks of life including English language teaching profession. The chapter will first situate the rationale for PD and mention why PD endeavors fail. The author will then propose a four-step scheme to respond to raising voices with regards to effectiveness of PD activities.

There is consensus among educational scholars that it is the teachers who play a pivotal role in constructing and shaping educational practices at all levels to eventually reach desirable outcomes in the educational arena. Yet it is also evident that in the current century, the teaching professionals are not at ease. In the past, teachers were solely expected to ‘transmit’ discrete items of knowledge one after other whereas, today, in line with the 21st century skills, teachers are expected to ‘transform’ their students into active agents who think creatively outside the box, approach any issue critically, solve problems appropriately, take the responsibility of learning process autonomously, choose the most effective instructional technology and exploit it in and out of classrooms effectively, and internalize the accumulated knowledge by communicating with peers collaboratively. Reshaped roles and demanding expectations from the teaching professionals within the current ever-changing world of knowledge necessitate ongoing updates on professional skills. Admittedly, the current scenario is that all teachers including English language teachers should be in a constant process of honing teaching skills and enhancing knowledge bases thereby meeting the educational needs of their students.

2. Rationale for Professional Development: Interdisciplinary Connections and New Trajectories

In the present century, the mainstream penchant in scientific endeavors has evidently proved to be of an interdisciplinary nature. The knowledge bases of some disciplines have been intertwined leading to proliferation of interrelated new disciplines with shared or similar grounds. The sisterhood between diverse disciplines naturally impacts the professionals, and teachers are not immune from this disciplinary partnerships. To elaborate, an American mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz's 'The Chaos/Complexity Theory' (a.k.a. The Butterfly Effect), (introduced in a seminal article titled 'Deterministic Nonperiodic Flow' in 1963) has found its place and interpretation in the language teaching profession. At the turn of the millennial century, a world-known applied linguist Diane Larsen-Freeman (1997), stated that chaos theory, which made its debut in natural sciences, might provide new insights into language teaching profession, in a sense reincarnation. Although it is beyond the foci of this chapter to include a full-fledged argument of the connection between chaos theory and language learning, suffice to say that Freeman simply argued the language classrooms exhibit certain features which are observable in the natural world. More specifically, the natural world is a place of diverse interconnectedness including some features that are dynamic, nonlinear, complex, unpredictable just like a typical language classroom.

Although there is no account of established connection so far to the best of my knowledge, another interdisciplinary marriage could be formed between Moran Cerf's the whole brain synchronization hypothesis (2020) and the theory of motivation in language teaching (Dörnyei, 1990; 1998). Being recognized as one of the 40 leading professors under 40 in the year (2019), Cerf Moran serves as an academician holding degrees in a multidisciplinary manner; BA in philosophy, MA in business management and PhD in neuroscience. Drawn from the scientific experiments realized at a neuroscience laboratory, Cerf claims that individuals tend to synchronize and adapt their behaviors in accordance with the others they spend the most time with. According to Cerf, if someone admires somebody's any talent then they should spend time with this talented person that the admired talent would eventually rob off to admirer. With Cerf's this finding in mind, we can encourage language students to spend time and practice with those whose language skills they admire whether it be fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and so on. In so doing, we can assume that the theory of motivation which has been receiving unwavering attention from researchers in the subfield of psycholinguistics will have anchored

in a legitimate and tangible harbor. Obviously, Cerf's neurological research finding has potential and promising insights into language classrooms. To illustrate Cerf's finding, teachers can simply encourage those students who have an aspiration to speak English fluently to spend most time with fluent peers in the classroom. In today's world where we witness the fluidity in scientific arena allows transferring findings from a variety of disciplines to our contexts is not surprising. That is, neuroscientist Cerf's finding with regards to the synchronization of behaviors can well be transferred to the language classrooms.

Along with the interdisciplinary nature of the current scientific endeavors, technological advances worldwide have started to reshape the educational practices. Simply put, today's classrooms are nothing but like hardwired labs. Smart boards, tablets, or similar mobile hitech toys have long secured their places in the language classrooms leading to the emergence of new innovative teaching paradigms such as hybrid, blended or flipped classrooms. Today's language learners can benefit visually and aurally from a number of technological innovations varying from videoconferencing, podcasts to Web 2.0 tools both in and out of classroom. Incidental learning experiences through available sources outside the classrooms enable language learners to go way beyond what intentional teaching/learning possibilities could offer inside the classrooms. As mentioned earlier, it is one of the impediments of today's language teachers to transform their students from 'spoonfed passive docile status' into 'autonomous learners' who are able to take the responsibility of their own learning outside the classroom and hold the ownership of their own learning thereby making sound decisions to construct and develop effective learning behaviors.

Admittedly, changing profiles of students who are in Prensky's (2005) words, 'digital natives' who were born into the age of computers impose challenges on today's language teachers. Being another pioneering area of research across the world, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is sure to have a potential impact on language teaching profession. The historian Harari in his bestselling book (2018) interprets the current century as a time characterized by twin revolutions in information technology (infotech) and biotechnology (biotech) and draws our attention to the impending unemployment problems thanks to the emerging applications of artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies in almost every field. With regards to the AI applications in language teaching profession, various online phonetic improvement applications with 'voice recognition' function enable learners to record their voice and obtain immediate accuracy checks. As thus, AI has already started to find a place in language learning and teaching practices. This and similar applications of AI herald a totally new era in

educational arena. All these AI applications, doubtless to say, have a potential to shape and open new avenues in language teaching profession. In 2022, a new application called ChatGPT was launched. This application generates ready-made texts for users based on the web-based corpora. It is already clear that language learners will be able to reach at massive source of input and generated texts at their service.

In light of briefly mentioned, somehow, phenomenal changes in the scientific realms across the world which are likely to continue, contemporary language teaching approaches will constantly be informed and enriched by a variety of disciplines forcing today's language teachers to keep up-to date, and somehow stay as 'learners' throughout their careers prioritizing ongoing PD. Taking all these points into consideration, commonsense suggests that graduating from college with a degree is just a start into a professional life which is presumably pregnant with upcoming technological advances, updates on knowledge bases, new skills and strategies. Within the ever-changing world of today, regardless of the profession, almost every professional is predestined to face various changes in workplaces and has to adapt to new requirements accordingly. Simply put, relying on a diploma granted after formal training of some years is out, but ongoing professional development is in. As thus, it would be true to say that lifelong learning, today's mostly-spelled out mantra, holds true for every profession including language teachers.

3. Reflective Teaching and PD

As far back as 1933, Dewey, while differentiating reflective thought from the clusters of idle, random ideas which visit our minds loosely in general, defined reflection as an "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further conclusions to which it leads" (p. 6). According to Dewey, reflection is organized sequences of thoughts, rather than loosely-produced and each thought is mutually interrelated being not idle but of an organized nature.

Dewey's ideas regarding 'reflection' led to the emergence of the concept of Reflective Practice which has become an area of research in academic circles in years. Schön (1983) further developed and perfected the concept of reflection and categorized it under two broad titles: reflection-in action and reflection-on action. This categorization made the concept more tangible for any given professional practice. Simply put, while 'reflection-in action' referred to spontaneous analysis of thought 'reflection-on action' required retrospective analysis of past experiences. Although the spark on the concept of 'reflection' was first lit up by Dewey, it

would seem that Schön's conceptualization of reflection has had the most influence in the field of language teacher education (Wallace, 1991; Ur, 1997).

Drawing on the conceptualizations of reflection developed by Schön, Wallace (1991) introduced the concept of reflective practice into the field of foreign language teaching. In an argument as to how 'professional expertise' is acquired, Wallace (1991) proposed three major models of professional training; the craft model, the applied science model and the reflective model. Unlike the other two traditional models where the professional trainee learns from an experienced practitioner by mostly imitating in the craft model, and the applied science model which is informed and nurtured by empirical science, the reflective model, Wallace argues, while both the craft and applied science model serve to obtaining what he calls 'received knowledge' whereas Schön's reflection-in action and reflection-on action can well be encapsulated in what he calls 'experiential knowledge' which is of ever-evolving dynamic nature. According to Wallace, a promising teacher training model should include both 'received' and 'experiential' knowledge which requires the trainees/teachers to get engaged in ongoing practice of reflection. To put simply, Wallace's model of professional competence includes practicing received knowledge and experiential knowledge through ongoing reflection.

According to Wallace's reflective model, in order to reach the ultimate goal of professional competence, trainees and teachers as well must be engaged in ongoing reflective analysis of their teaching practices. The notion of reflective teaching in teacher education is viewed as one of the essential ingredients of what constitutes an effective teacher who is reflecting, critically analyzing her practices in an ongoing format through a variety of procedures of professional development.

Little (1987) defined professional development as "any activity that is intended partly or primarily to prepare paid staff members for improved performance in present or future roles in the school districts" (p. 491). Unlike Professional training, Professional development is an ongoing process serving to longer-term goals. Determined by experts, the content of training is designed to prepare teachers for fulfilling the short-term immediate goals of the teaching profession. However, as argued by Richards and Farrell (2005), it would be unrealistic to assume that any teacher training programs of some duration will be able meet all professional needs of teacher candidates who, in turn, will address the learning needs of their students. While formal training is able to teach the basics the teacher candidates need to survive and execute teaching practices in classroom on daily basis, development secures an ongoing growth on the

part of the teachers to understand, analyze and accommodate their teaching in accordance with the changing contextual needs. To this end, it can be said that while training tends to rely on given knowledge by experts, that is, from an ‘outsider’ ‘development’ can and ideally should be triggered by ‘insider’ drives. That is, teachers themselves should have an awareness of their professional needs in the first place and have a willing to engage in professional development activities. Hence nobody can make us ‘develop’, it is preferably triggered by teachers themselves.

4. Components of Effective PD Endeavors

PD activities are offered to teachers at all levels around the world. However, the debate over the intended efficacy of those activities reveals that despite the efforts invested into designing effective PD activities the result is not cost-effective. Given that the current century is characterized by speed and influx of information the time invested in designing more effective professional activities needs to be reevaluated for the benefits of both parties; the participants and the designers.

In the related literature, professional development activities designed for teacher learning are criticized as they fail to provide the participants with hands-on experiences (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2010). Usually interpreted as a ‘patchwork of opportunities’ by the participants (Drury & Baer, 2011), PD activities are critiqued by the participating teachers. Of the reasons, mismatch between the needs and the content of the PD opportunity comes fore as the most evident one. In order for those activities to be effective a set of components needs to be put into consideration. Bayar (2014) conducted a qualitative research investigating the opinions about the components of effective PD activities. The data were collected via in-depth interviews with the participation of 16 teachers over a period of 12 months. The findings showed that the first component of effective PD activities is related to the extent that the offered activity addresses the needs of the participants. The participants also mentioned their intention to get involved in the preparation and designing PD activities. The more, the participants stated, they are involved in the decision making and designing these activities, the more motivated they would feel to participate.

With regards to the duration and frequency of PD activities, the participants stated their need for ‘long-term engagement’ better than one-shot seminars or workshops. Another recommendation was related to the quality of the instructors who are in charge of designing and delivering the content of the activities.

Other studies have provided similar components with regards to effective PD activities; the content or the focus of the PD activity, provision of active learning activities, hands-on experiences, coherence, duration of the activity and the collective participation of all the stakeholders (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Kennedy, 1998; Wilson & Berne, 1999).

As it has been already discussed in the above sections in a world where everything is changing teacher learning can never be limited to a formal education of some duration. Then the question rises as to how to design to-the-point PD activities which serve to the actual needs of the participants; in this case, English language teachers. Based on the extant literature and my personal experiences loaded with observational data and ethnographic research, I here propose a four-step scheme that could be followed when designing PD activities. The following figure shows the steps.

In the rest of the chapter, I will first discuss each component and later will exemplify and thus elaborate the proposed scheme on a PD activity which is action research.

5. Four-step Scheme for Designing Effective PD Activities

In order for human beings to understand the value of something and attach meaning to, above all else, they are supposed to feel the need of that thing. Collective mind suggests that just like the inventions morph into flesh and blood as a result of a necessity, in order to foster people to participate in an organized event, the potential participants must feel a need to participate whether intrinsically or extrinsically. These events should not be organized with one-size-fits-all mentality. Instead, PD activities should be organized in accordance with the needs of the participants.

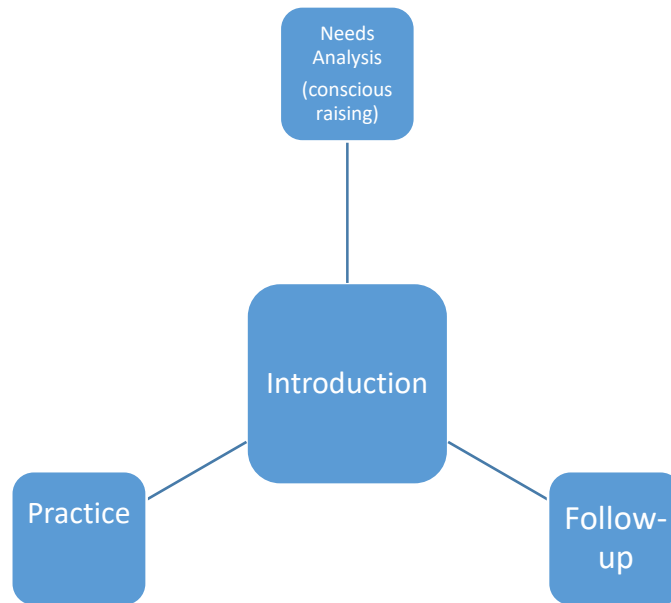


Figure 1. Four-step Scheme for Designing PD Activities

5.1. Needs Analysis and Conscious Raising Stage

In Türkiye, PD activities are typically offered to practicing language teachers in the form of in-service seminars. Ministry of National Education organizes and delivers workshops and seminars across the country. The in-service PD activities are generally executed in big cities addressing to limited number of teachers. Usually mandatory by nature, the topics are decided by the ministry. In order for the PD activities to be effective, the focus of the event needs to be based on the immediate needs of the participants. A general needs analysis survey can be conducted first in the whole country, later in separate regions. As professional needs of teachers practicing at school types, levels, contexts, and locations would be varied, it would be wise to administer first a general needs analysis survey to have a snapshot of the whole landscape across the country. In the survey, clusters of questions could be categorized along a scale to identify teachers immediate professional needs. Based on the findings of the general needs analysis survey, a more specified survey could be administered to the teachers based on the location, region and level. The in-service seminars which are organized based on the specified needs of the practicing language teachers are expected to be more effective than those organized in top-down manner.

In this first part, it is also important to highlight the necessity of PD within the realities of the present time teaching practices. Raising awareness of the participants and drawing their attention to ever-developing nature of the teaching profession is equally important at this stage.

As discussed earlier, in order for teachers to participate in the PD activities, they should first feel the need and internalize it. This can be achieved through questions that align with the realities of the new teaching context such as digital literacy, higher order thinking skills and similar items mentioned in the 21st century skills.

5.2. Introduction

The second step is to introduce the participants the types of PD activities in accordance with their needs. PD activities range from solo and group activities. Richards and Farrell (2005) list a number of PD activities varying from self-monitoring, keeping a teaching journal, peer observation to action research. This second step is designed to familiarize the participants with available PD activities. To this end, a showcase of activities could be introduced to the teachers in every city across the country. The directorate offices of the national education in the cities would be in charge of designing seminars on PD activities. Within the framework of school-university partnerships these seminars could be delivered by the teaching staff of the English language teaching departments when available. The duration of introductory stage of PD activities might last a week to ten days. At the end of this stage practice teams could be arranged in each school based on teachers' preferred PD activity. At the end of the event, in order to hear the voices of the participating teachers in all senses an evaluation form needs to be delivered. Such an evaluation will both include the teachers in the whole process of building up a learning community and provide insights into future PD events.

5.3. Practice

After the needs of the teachers are identified and the teachers get familiarized with PD activities the third step in the scheme is to transfer the accumulated knowledge into the practice. At this stage, the participating teachers are encouraged to experiment with the obtained knowledge in their immediate teaching contexts. Based on particular professional needs teachers can start to practice a PD activity of their own preference either solo or in groups. At this stage, whenever possible, the teaching staff of the ELT departments can provide guidance. Within the practice stage, pairs can be arranged for team teaching or peer observation. In other cases, teachers might want to keep a teaching journal documenting their own teaching practices in their own teaching milieu. In the same way, a group of teachers from various schools might get together to form a reading community where they can read and discuss some articles they find useful for their professional development. In other cases, teachers might form groups to analyze critical cases

that appear in their particular teaching contexts. What is important at this stage is provide freedom with teachers to choose the PD activity they would love to test out.

5.4. Follow-up

This important stage of follow-up is usually ignored and neglected by the organizers at the expense of potential benefits for the participants. The prevalent idea when designing PD events is usually bombarding the participants with conceptual knowledge during one-shot events. This read-only mentality is unfortunately far from fulfilling the transformative mission of the whole efforts. The fact that the teachers are now knowledgeable about various PD activities and have already started to experiment with them does not guarantee that they are able and lead to realization of theoretical knowledge. Transformative aspect of such PD events requires regular follow-up sessions until the participants come up with intended benefits. That is, a well-organized PD event should examine and check on the outcomes of a specific PD activity teachers are involved. Most of the time, teachers are left to themselves with a bunch of conceptual knowledge. Once the groups are formed among teachers to practice a particular PD activity, follow-ups need to be done on regular basis. This can be organized through separate meetings with groups of teachers or actual visits to the schools where teachers are involved in PD activities. At this stage, the staff from directorate office of the national education and teaching staff from the ELT departments might work in collaboration.

6. An Exemplary PD Activity Through the Proposed Four-Step Scheme

6.1. Action Research Project

In-service seminars of any kind are typical PD activities in Türkiye. Generally organized by the local offices of the Ministry of National Education, these events are top-down and mandatory by nature. As discussed earlier, unlike training, professional development activities are expected to be initiated by individual teachers. Whereas training is provided with trainers outside our will for a certain period of time, professional development is ideally started by self and continues throughout the teaching career. To this end, it is assumed that PD activities should not be obligatory. Instead, teachers should be encouraged to participate in such activities. To extrinsically motivate the teachers and incentivize thereof, some extra points can be added to their professional file of master teachership status.

6.2. Needs Analysis and Conscious Raising Stage

Kumaravadivelu (2005) proposed 3P to describe the post-methods era; particularity, practicality and possibility. Of them, practicality suggests teachers theorize their own teaching practices in

their own particular contexts. Criticizing the one-size-fits all methodologies delineated for teachers so far, Kumaravadivelu argued that each teaching context has its own particularities and the teacher needs to be knowledgeable to draw theories based on individual teaching experiences in their teaching context. Remedial attempts with ready-made methodologies, he argued, could cure the problems that occur in a particular teaching contexts. It is teachers who are expected to produce theories align with the contextual realities. Simply put, if any kind of improvement would take place in language teaching classrooms it would be thanks to the teachers who do not consume ready-made packages of teaching philosophies produced by others, but those teachers who produce their own custom-made pedagogies. Teachers, according to Kumaravadivelu, should not be consumers of knowledge, yet they should produce their own teaching theories. As a matter of fact, this type of perspective is beneficial in two ways; once teachers turn to be theorizers of their own teaching, in the first place, they hold the ownership of their own profession and in so doing they also become empowered. Teacher empowerment is, as is known, an important area of research in the field. One good way of transforming teachers from being mere consumers to producers is to teach them how to conduct classroom research in order to investigate insistent, recurring problems in their classrooms. Therefore, action research needs to be listed in top ten PD activities that are planned to be offered to teachers. Furthermore, the author in a study investigating the PD needs of English language teachers, found action research is the least familiar topic to the participants (2013).

6.3. Action Research as a PD Activity and the Four-Step Scheme

6.3.1. Introduction

The participating teachers are introduced and trained for a week about the action research by teaching staff from the ELT department. At the end of this stage teachers are equipped with necessary knowledge and expertise to conduct an action research in their teaching environments.

6.3.2. Practice

The participating teachers identify a recurrent problem to investigate in their immediate teaching environments. They start practicing what they have obtained through the training. During this period, a professional network has presumably been established among the teachers working at different schools. Collaboration among teachers is expected to yield promising results through collected effort. It is during this stage teachers share ideas and experiences with their colleagues from other schools.

6.3.3. Follow-up

During the follow-up stage of the scheme the participating teachers are visited at their schools by the teaching staff and mini conferences are held. The teachers are asked as to how they have been using the findings of the action research projects. The challenges they have encountered are detailed and recommendations are provided for their next endeavors. The directorate office of the national education might organize meetings with the action researcher teachers in which they can find the opportunity to share their learning experiences with their colleagues. By creating such a learning community, it is assumed that those who are not involved in PD activities are encouraged to participate in following activities.

Darling-Hammond (2010) states that teachers value PD activities based on the extent the activity provides the participants with ‘hands-on’ experiences and they leave with a take-away that they can utilize in their immediate teaching environment. As is discussed earlier, in today’s world of fluidity, PD is a must for every profession including English language teaching profession. However, it is only with those PD activities that are informed by teachers’ immediate needs and enhanced by a practical component participating teacher can get most of the benefits.

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