

Analysis of professional development needs of teachers of the less commonly taught languages

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Workshop objectives

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By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. be familiar with the specific training and professional development needs of teachers of less-commonly taught language; and
2. explore new and innovative approaches to meet those needs.

What professional development aims to achieve

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- Professional development for language teachers is no longer just discussing a certain pedagogical aspect with teachers in a traditional-based workshop or a series of workshops, or discussing some new approaches to teach a language.
- Professional development, at a time where teachers are required to be accountable for their learners' performance, necessitates a fundamental change in a teacher's practices and attitudes that enhance learning in the classroom.

What is research telling us

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- Research shows the ineffectiveness that traditional workshop-based professional development (Yoon et al, 2007).
- The challenge for teachers is not learning about new teaching approaches.
- Joyce and Showers, 2002 have shown that it might take more than 20 times of practice for a teacher to apply the skills effectively in the classroom (Joyce and Showers, 2002).

Commonalities among LCTLs

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- Many LCTLs are often institutionally isolated
- LCTLs lack resources and visibility, the perceived importance compared to larger, more prominent programs
- Textbooks and teaching materials are either non-existent or outdated
- Low numbers of student enrollments (currently we have only 9 students in the Nepali, Bengali, and the Mongolia sections at FSI)
- Numbers of teachers relatively small (currently we have only 8 teachers the majority of whom are limited time contractors)
- Few of the LCTL teachers have extensive preparation specifically in language pedagogy.

Commonalities among LCTLs

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- Many LCTL teachers do indeed lack solid formal training in language education.
- Many LCTL teachers are under-supported and under appreciated.
- Many LCTL teachers are unable to take advantage of professional development opportunities, because of lack of institutional support

What is research telling us?

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- Research shows the ineffectiveness that traditional workshop-based professional development (Yoon et al, 2007).
- The largest struggle for teachers is not learning new approaches to teaching but implementing them in the classroom. Implementing a teaching strategy in the classroom is more difficult than learning the strategy itself.
- In fact, studies have shown it takes, on average, 20 separate instances of practice, before a teacher has mastered a new skill, with that number increasing along with the complexity of the skill (Joyce and Showers, 2002).

Future direction of LCTL teacher professional development

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- LCTL teachers need to adopt a constructivist approach to teaching and learning.
- Teachers of LCTLs should be active learners involved in several teaching tasks such as teaching, working towards growing professionally, reflecting on their daily practices, and assessment.

Future direction of of LCTL teacher professional development

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- Teachers of LCTL languages need to seek ways to maintain connections with other practitioners in the field.
- This need more than likely arises from a sense of isolation and lack of visibility.
- Collegiality is so crucial in planning any kind of professional development for LCTL teachers.
- Teachers learn most effectively from other colleagues and from themselves.
- In the case of Nepali, Bengali, and Mongolian at FSI, there is always the need for that kind of collaborative networking among each other and among other instructors in other language sections.

Future direction of of LCTL teacher professional development

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- Professional development for teachers of LCTLs should take place with a certain teaching context and on the bases on what goes in the classroom (Mclaughlin and Zarrow, 2001)
- This principle is applied to Nepali, Bengali, and Mongolian; languages I am supporting at FSI.
- Professional development for LCTL teachers needs to be done within the political context in which the teachers work, and with some form of institutional political action.

Future direction of of LCTL teacher professional development

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- Professional development of LCTLs should involve the work and collaboration of the whole institution, including teachers as reflective practioners.
- Professional development is most effective when there is meaningful interactions (Clement and Vanderberghe, 2000)
- Professional development of LCTL teachers needs to consider the personal characteristics and the professional profiles of those teachers.
- Professional development for those teachers should be considered an individual and organizational process.

Future direction of of LCTL teacher professional development

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- Ongoing feedback should be provided to LCTL teachers.
- Continuous follow up, support and pressure should be maintained
- Respect for those teachers as professional and adult learners should be awarded.
- Professional development should be accompanied by organizational cultural and political spirit of reform and care.

Future direction of of LCTL teacher professional development

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- Time for opportunities of professional development should be made available.
- Understanding that real engagement in developing teaching skills will prove a learning opportunity relevant to those teachers' needs.

Future direction of LCTL teacher professional development

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- Planning should be in place for an experiential learning cycle, of setting goals, self monitoring and evaluation, and providing support and feedback from others.
- It's useful to appoint a mentor especially for new LCTL teachers.

References

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