

An Analysis of Effective Teacher PD Practices for Elementary School Home Room Teachers of Foreign Language Classes

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the effectiveness of a professional development (PD) workshop for elementary school home room teachers in Japan who are required to instruct English language classes following the policies described in MEXT's 2020 New Course of Study. The authors describe herein the details of the teacher PD approach taken, then examine this approach through a traditional model of evaluation, the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model, and through a more recent framework of 7 key features of effective teacher PD (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017) to determine the effectiveness of the training. The authors conclude by discussing the implications and limitations of conducting similar PD practices for in-service teachers in Japan, namely that PD needs to be of a sustained duration to take hold and be measurable.

この記事は、文部科学省 2020 年学習指導要領に記載されている方針に従って英語の授業を指導する必要がある日本の小学校の担任教師を対象とした専門能力開発 (PD) ワークショップの有効性を分析することを目的としている。著者らはここで、教師 PD アプローチの詳細を説明し、次に評価の従来モデルである Kirkpatrick 評価モデル、および近年発表された効果的な教師 PD の 7 つの主要機能の枠組み (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017) に基づき研修の有効性の評価を行う。著者らは、日本で現職の教師に対して同様の PD を実施することの意味と限界について議論することによって結論を下す。すなわち、PD が定着し、測定可能となるためには持続的な期間を必要とするということである。

Keywords: Team Teaching, Elementary School English, Teacher Professional Development, Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model

1. Introduction

This article outlines an approach to professional development (PD) for elementary school home room teachers (HRTs) who are now required to teach English as part of the school curriculum. In the 2020 New Course of Study, English is a compulsory subject 3 times a week for the 5th and 6th grades which is in full-scale implementation across Japan. For the 3rd and 4th grades, classes revolve around English language activities at least once or twice a week. Also, the 2020 New Course of Study emphasizes the HRT as taking on the lead role during English lessons. While the enactment of these policies may vary from one locality to another, Boards of Educations (BOEs) across Japan are conducting various forms of PD for in-service elementary school teachers. At the same time the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is supporting these policies with a number of PD initiatives. The authors of this article took part in a series of teacher-training webinars that focused on English language teaching in elementary schools. We were tasked with developing a workshop on effective team teaching. The purpose

of this workshop was twofold: 1) to promote the confidence necessary in the HRTs to successfully take on the role of the lead teacher (T1) in English lessons; 2) to enable HRTs to work effectively with the Assistant Language Teacher (ALT), who are foreign nationals, in a team-teaching situation. In order to meet these goals, we developed a number of materials, video lectures, example lesson plans, models of instruction, and activities for the workshop participants.

2. Background and Rationale

2.1 Background

In 2011, English education became compulsory in Japanese elementary schools. Based on a comprehensive plan laid out by MEXT, incremental reforms to English education have taken place since 2014 with the goal of full-scale implementation by 2020. The increasing needs of a globalized workforce combined with the prospect of hosting the Olympics provided the impetus to see such changes enacted.

2.2 Context

The Meikai Teacher-Training Support Center (METTS) of Meikai University in Chiba, Japan, applied for a grant from MEXT to create a series of PD workshops on English language education for elementary school teachers. The series of five PD workshops was held via webinars between October and December 2020. Each webinar dealt with a different aspect of English language education. The authors of this paper hosted the second webinar workshop on effective team teaching and building rapport with the ALT. Three BOEs from school districts in Chiba, Tokyo and Akita prefectures were invited to participate in this PD event. All workshop participants received pre-materials and post-materials.

2.3 Rationale

When tasked to create a professional development workshop there are many things to consider. The purpose of the workshop, the structure it will take, and the technical aspects such as the means of delivery. In terms of the latter, a media communications company was hired to supply technical expertise. It is also essential to consider how to achieve the goals and objectives of the workshop.

2.3.1 Effective Teacher Professional Development

What qualities or characteristics make PD training effective for in-service teachers? A traditional model of workplace training evaluation that has been used in business management is the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model. This model was originally put forward in 1959 by Donald Kirkpatrick, a professor emeritus of Training and Development at the University of Wisconsin and past president of the American Society for Training and Development. The Kirkpatrick model uses four levels of evaluation: 1. reaction, 2. learning, 3. behavior, and 4. results. As Paull, Whitsed, and Girardi (2016) point out, the Kirkpatrick model has become more prevalent in higher education, despite differing opinions regarding its effectiveness, due to the ease in applying this simple framework. Table 1. is the authors' interpretation of Kirkpatrick's model as applied to teacher PD.

Table 1 Summary of the Kirkpatrick Model as applied to Teacher PD

Level	Evaluation Type	Description	Key Question
1	Reaction	This level evaluates how the participants felt about the training or experience.	Did they like the training?
2	Learning	This level evaluates how much the participants have gained knowledge between the start and end of the training.	Did they learn from the training? If so, how much?

3	Behavior	This level examines through interviews and observation the extent to which the participants have incorporated the training into their work.	Were they able to apply the training to their situation?
4	Results	This level measures the degree to which the changes in the participants' behavior have had an impact on their environment.	Did the training have an impact on student outcomes?

More recently, in their research, Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) conducted a systematic review of thirty-five studies relating teacher PD to teaching practices and student outcomes. From their findings, they synthesized a list of 7 features for effective PD:

1. Is **content focused**
2. Incorporates **active learning** utilizing adult learning theory
3. Supports **collaboration**, typically in job-embedded contexts
4. Uses **models and modeling** of effective practice
5. Provides **coaching and expert support**
6. Offers opportunities for **feedback and reflection**
7. Is of **sustained duration**

(Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017, p. 4)

These features make for a useful framework for analysis which will be elaborated in the Discussion below.

2.3.3 Workshop Design, Materials, and Administration

The workshop consisted of three parts: pre-task materials, the webinar, and post-task materials. With the exception of the webinar that required live attendance, all of the materials were hosted on a website for participants to access at their convenience. The pre-task materials included 4 PowerPoint presentations with recorded audio on classroom language, strategies for building rapport with the ALT, effective team-teaching strategies, and roles of the HRT and ALT. A video of a model lesson was included along with a Communication Activity Lesson plan. During the ninety-minute webinar, held in Japanese and English, we gave strategies for building rapport along with intercultural communication skills. A model was performed in addition to the viewing of a video of an HRT explaining a lesson plan using rapport-building strategies. Teachers in the audience received a worksheet with role play situations and one volunteer from each BOE acted in the role of HRT with one of the authors who played an ALT. A chant activity closed out the event to demonstrate how small activities can lead to high engagement and participation. In the post-task materials, participants received a variation to the communication activity lesson plan, a practice activity variation, a PDF of classroom language, and a lesson plan template.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

Three BOEs from school districts in Chiba, Tokyo and Akita prefectures were invited to attend this webinar series. On the day of the second webinar, which is the focus of this article, 173 people logged into the event. Of that number, 94 submitted the survey in response to our webinar. The largest number of participants came from the Tokyo BOE school district at 115. The Chiba BOE school district was 37 and the Akita BOE school district was 21. Of the total participants, 51% were currently HRTs of grades 1 to 5. 9% were English specialists. The remaining attendees worked in other capacities such as administrators in

the BOE or were pre-service teachers. In addition, 52% of the participants had 0 to 3 years of experience leading a class on foreign language activities and 0 to 3 years of experience team teaching in foreign language activities.

3.2 Instruments

Participants were asked to answer a survey at the end of each webinar, as well as a survey evaluating the technical logistics of using an online platform. The authors were not involved in the design of these instruments and therefore can only report on the questions asked and the results. The post-webinar survey included background information on which BOE school district they came from, their current position, and their years of experience leading foreign language activities and team teaching foreign language activities. The following questions were then asked: 1) Did the course contents meet the needs of your school situation? 2) Were the course contents appropriate for you? 3) Do you feel that you can make use of the designated course materials later? 4) Were the course instructors' explanations easy to understand? 5) Were the pre-task lessons useful? 6) Was the workshop task useful? 7) In general, were you satisfied by this workshop? 8) If a course such as this one were offered again, would you take it?

4. Results

Below are the results of the survey questions as responded to by participants after the second webinar took place.

Table 2 Results from the Survey Post-Webinar

Question N = 94	I really think so	I think so	I can't say either way	I don't think so	I really don't think so
1) Did the course contents meet the needs of your school situation?	26%	52%	19%	3%	0%
2) Were the course contents appropriate for you?	3% (too difficult)	18% (a little difficult)	59% (appropriate)	16% (a little easy)	4% (too easy)
3) Do you feel that you can make use of the designated course materials later?	44%	46%	9%	1%	0%
4) Were the course instructors' explanations easy to understand?	62%	31%	6%	1%	0%
5) Were the pre-task lessons useful?	45%	45%	7%	3%	0%
6) Was the workshop task useful?	45%	45%	7%	3%	0%
7) In general, were you satisfied by this workshop?	47%	42%	10%	1%	0%
8) If a course such as this one were offered again, would you take it?	36%	47%	13%	4%	0%

5. Discussion

5.1 Analysis of the Survey Results

As was mentioned above, the survey was not designed by the authors of this article. The questions asked were generally broad so as to apply to the contents of each webinar. Based on the survey results for the second webinar, there are certain insights that can be gleaned. First, 78% of the respondents indicated in question 1) that the course contents fit the needs of their schools. While this feedback is heartening, it should be noted that the elementary school teachers who joined from the BOE school district in Tokyo (a majority of the attendees) do not currently have ALTs in their school program. Under these circumstances, it would seem that the materials directly addressing team teaching with an ALT and building rapport with an ALT can not be assessed at this time.

Second, with respect to the materials as reported in question 3), 90% of the respondents believe that they can make use of the materials later on, and found the pre-task materials and workshop materials to be useful, see questions 5) and 6). Post-task materials were also provided to the workshop participants and it is unfortunate that there is no data regarding the usefulness of these materials.

Finally, with regards to satisfaction over the webinar, 89% indicated that they were satisfied. Although this could be considered a high degree of overall satisfaction, it might have been helpful to explore further the reasons behind those participants who answered they could not say either way or did not think so. It should be noted as well that 83% stated that they would be interested in other workshops of this nature. This supports the authors' beliefs that teachers desire more support, education, and training for teaching English language in elementary schools.

Aside from a discussion of the results of the survey, it is important to consider the limitations of this data and this type of PD. Had we been able to create a survey specific to our webinar, we would have asked questions that examined in more detail respondents understanding and use of the materials. Furthermore, of greater importance to MEXT and BOEs in general is whether these trainings lead to changes or improvements in teacher instruction. To collect data on that would require a longitudinal study to observe, interview and evaluate teachers performance in relation to the PD program over time.

5.2 Evaluation of the Workshop Against the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model

The Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model uses four levels of evaluation. The first level focuses on the reaction of the training participants. In other words, did they like it? Given that 90% stated they found the workshop task useful, 89% responded that they were satisfied, and 83% indicated that they would be interested in taking other workshops such as this one, it seems safe to say that by these measures, the workshop achieved the goal of level 1. The second level looks at learning. Kirkpatrick suggests that learning involves a change in attitudes, increased knowledge, and/or skills, which need to be measured; however, application of the newly acquired information is not necessary at level 2 (Usum, 2015). While the workshop participants received a significant amount of materials created by the authors, there is no data to show to what degree each participant increased their knowledge of the topic. The third level seeks to evaluate how the participants changed their behavior based on the training they received; whereas the fourth level evaluates the impact those behavioral changes have on the surrounding environment. Due to the parameters set by the grant, follow-up studies were not part of the training design. This is not uncommon as there is a tendency to rely on the first two levels of training as the third and fourth levels can be more challenging to measure (Steele, et al., 2016). Additionally, the first two levels are generally within familiar territory of the workshop trainers (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2009). Furthermore, research by Sandy Almeida as discussed by Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2009) points to a high correlation between levels 1 and 2, and levels 3 and 4. On the other hand, no significant correlation was found between levels 2 and 3.

The conclusion drawn from this is that for behavioral changes to take place and measurable outcomes to be achieved, providing quality training is not enough. There needs to be continuous reinforcement of the learning through supplemental training over a length of time.

5.3 Evaluation of the Workshop Against the 7 Features of Effective Teacher PD

The authors now turn to analysis of our PD workshop in terms of each of the seven features in the proposed framework of effective teacher PD by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017). The researchers note that successful PD models may incorporate all or most of these features. The first feature is that the PD is content-focused; in other words, “it is most often job embedded, meaning the PD is situated in teacher’s classrooms with their students, as opposed to generic PD delivered externally or divorced from teacher’s school or district contexts” (p. 5). As mentioned above, the content focus of the PD in question on effective team teaching may have been suitable for the BOEs whose school districts had developed ALT programs, but less so for the BOE school district in Tokyo, which does not currently have an ALT program.

The second and third features, active learning and collaboration, respectively, are distinct, but related features and so will be considered together for the present purposes. According to Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) active learning incorporates teachers’ experiences into the PD training and engages them with respect to their classroom practices. Active learning is the opposite of traditional lecture-based learning. Collaboration in PD is also an important feature which can range from pair, to group work, to collaborative opportunities beyond the PD itself such as involvement in a Professional Learning Community (PLC). In terms of the workshop design discussed here, the authors took the utmost care to engage the teachers taking the training session by incorporating their experiences and providing opportunities for collaboration in the workshop tasks and materials.

The fourth feature of effective teacher PD is the use of models and modeling such as “video or written cases of teaching, demonstration lessons, units or lesson plans, observations of peers, and curriculum materials, including sample assessments, and student work samples” (p. 11). Apart from peer observation, the effective team teaching workshop used extensive models and modeling in the pre-task materials, workshop task materials, and post-task materials. These are listed above in 2.3.3.

The fifth feature is coaching and expert support. This feature relates to the role experts have in helping foster and guide teachers during the PD by providing instructional models of the intended outcomes of the training, facilitating group discussion and collaboration and so forth. The authors paid particular attention to not only modeling the target outcomes during the workshop, but incorporating the teacher participants into these models and then advising and praising the teacher participants on the performance of the model or target outcome.

The sixth feature of effective teacher PD is feedback and reflection. Productive PD training allows participants to receive feedback and time to reflect on their efforts in order to make changes. In our workshop, we were able to provide generalized feedback, but minimal individual feedback. In the post-webinar survey, teachers were asked to submit their reflections on the workshop.

The seventh and final feature of the framework is sustained duration of the PD. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) note that a clear time frame for successful PD models has not been established; however, research shows that one-time training does not allow for deeper learning and application of the material studied.

6. Conclusion

The high attendance rate of the webinar indicates an interest in PD for foreign language teaching. As it was held as a webinar series, this allowed for live attendance by a large group of teachers and education administrators from distant locations. Recordings of the webinars will eventually be available and the

materials are also available for download. Future PD should consider establishing a library of PDs on a number of topics related to English language education that teachers can access at their own pace and convenience.

In addition, the design of PD needs to be carefully considered. In this article, the authors employed two program evaluation models of distinct origin. Even so, the models showed similar strengths and weaknesses in our workshop design. As for the strengths, our workshop design achieved at least 5 of the 7 features of effective teacher PD. Conversely, both models reveal the workshop's design weakness in the inability to measure achievement of target outcomes through sustained follow-up training and observations.

Finally, much has been made in the literature of the need to prepare students for the 21st century workplace. This, in turn, has placed pressure on teachers to stay on top of changes to educational policies that are being adopted by school systems. The true value of a comprehensive and systematic PD is found in the skills and knowledge of students. For it is students who benefit from the changes to teaching practices and it is students who demonstrate the learning they have internalized. As the famous American inventor Benjamin Franklin said, "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn."

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