

5 Core Ideas to Build Effective PD Programs

by [Autumn Westphal](#)

Providing meaningful and useful professional development (PD) can be a great way to keep your teachers motivated and using up-to-date practices. However, program administrators often find it difficult to ensure that these training opportunities are not only effective, but also that teachers feel motivated to participate in them. At TESOL 2014 in Portland, Oregon, my colleagues Noga La'or, James Stakenburg, and I presented five core ideas that we currently use to encourage and foster an environment of growth and teacher education at our school.

Types of PD

When creating a PD program at your school, it is helpful to offer a variety of types of PD in order to motivate teachers. To help create a program with variety, consider approaching PD from a few different angles: the administrator, the teacher, and the individual.

Administrator-Driven PD

This PD is managed by the administration at the school. The administrator would be at the core of whatever type of development was being offered—making PD information available, leading PD workshops (PDWs) or delegating the responsibility for PD to the appropriate person. For example, my school often subscribes to ELT publications that the teachers may not have access to. As we receive these publications, they are forwarded by the administrator to the teachers, or a printed version is placed in the teacher's room.

Teacher-Driven PD

Teacher-driven PD is often initiated by the administrator, but then followed through with by the teacher. An administrator might create a PDW schedule, but the workshops themselves are led by the teachers at the school. Developing self-reflection by having teachers reflect (typically by filling out a form) before and after a teaching observation is another example of teacher-driven PD.

Individual-Driven PD

This type of PD is often the hardest to encourage or control on the part of the administrator. This type of PD is done at the discretion of the teacher and on his or her own time. Some examples include: reading books, subscribing to ELT magazines/publications/newsletters/websites/blogs, becoming a member of ELT organizations, attending webinars, attending conferences, and/or doing self-guided Internet research.

Keeping in mind *who* is driving the professional development is key when considering the five core ideas, as this ensures a variety of professional development options for teachers to take advantage of. The five core ideas are all administrator- and teacher-driven, with Core Idea #5 also being individual-driven.

The 5 Core Ideas

1. Pre- and Post-Observation Meetings and Reflection
2. Peer Observations
3. Professional Development Meetings for Idea-Sharing
4. Regularly Scheduled Professional Development Workshops
5. Setting up an Online Presence for Professional Development

Core Idea 1: Pre- and Post-Observation Meetings & Reflection

It's a common practice as a program administrator to observe teachers and provide them with feedback on their lessons. However, in order to fully maximize the potential of these observations, it can be helpful to follow these three steps:

- a. **PRE stage:** Meet with the teacher to gather his or her thoughts on what he or she wants the observer to look for. In this meeting, the observer can also have the chance to inform the teacher about key issues that will be focused on during the observation. This can promote teacher buy-in and also empower the teacher to take charge of his or her growth and development. (See preobservation form example)
- b. **DURING stage:** Observe the teacher, taking specific observation notes based on the discussion from the PRE stage. (See observation form example)
- c. **POST stage:** Give the teacher a post-observation form to fill out before the post-observation feedback meeting to discuss the class observed. This helps focus the teacher before the feedback will happen. The form can also give the observer context for the feedback session—by knowing what the teacher noticed, the observer will be able to better guide the teacher to deeper reflection. (See post-observation form example)

Core Idea 2: Peer Observations

It can take a bit of finagling on the part of the program administrator, but creating a culture of peer observation in a school can greatly add to the spirit of collaboration among teachers. We advise that a school allows teachers to observe each other at any time, as long as it is first scheduled with their supervisor and the observing teacher can find coverage for his or her classes. Peer observations are important for all teachers, but especially for newer ones. By observing an experienced peer, a new teacher can get a better handle on the educational culture of the school in addition to gaining practical knowledge on how to handle his or her class.

Administrators can also ask teachers to observe as part of their PD. Again, peer observations are especially important for new or struggling teachers. By making peer observations a required part of a new teacher's PD, you can guarantee that the teacher is getting the additional support he or she needs but may not ask for directly. One way to do this is to arrange a formal "peer observation" week (see Figure 1). Substitute teachers sub so teachers can observe. This means

that the school needs to be willing to compensate teachers for the time they spend observing other teachers as well as finding or hiring substitutes as needed.

RENNERT NEW YORK PEER OBSERVATION SCHEDULE					APRIL 2013
April 22 AM 1) Audrey sub Selina Selina observe Matt 2) Rachel sub Bonni Bonni observe Rick 3) Cassie sub Laurianne Laurianne observe Paul	April 23 AM 1) Audrey sub Fiona Fiona observe Rick 2) Aydin sub Carol Carol observe Selina 3) Cassie sub Mike Mike observe Meghan	April 24 AM 1) Audrey sub Alise Alise observe David 2) Aydin sub Rachel Rachel observe Carol 3) Cassie sub Joanna Joanna observe Megan	April 25 AM 1) Audrey sub Paul Paul observe Alise 2) Angelina sub Meghan Meghan observe Elizabeth 3) Cassie sub Matt Matt observe Chris	April 26 AM 1) Audrey sub Elizabeth Elizabeth observe Joanna 2) Angelina sub Rick Rick observe Valerie 3) Brad sub Susanne Susanne observe Laurianne	
April 22 PM 1) Rick sub David David observe Carolyn	April 23 PM 1) Carolyn observe Bonni	April 24 PM 1) Rick sub Sarah	April 25 PM 1) Rick sub Sarah Sarah observe David	April 26 PM No observations	
April 29 AM 1) Angelina sub Megan Megan observe Alex 2) Audrey sub Valerie Valerie observe Bea	April 30 AM 1) Angelina sub Chris Chris observe Carissa 2) Audrey sub Bea Bea observe Valerie	May 1 AM 1) Angelina sub Alex Alex observe Niko 2) Audrey sub Carissa Carissa observe Mike 3) Cassie sub Cary Cary observe Paul	May 2 AM 1) Angelina sub Niko Niko observe Susanne 2) Audrey sub Courtney Courtney observe Meghan	May 3 AM No observations	
April 29 PM 1) Carissa sub Geovany Geovany observe Sarah	April 30 PM 2) Carissa sub Svetlana Svetlana observe David	May 1 PM 1) Carissa sub Audrey Audrey observe Svetlana	May 2 PM No observations	May 3 PM No observations	

Figure 1. Peer Observation Week Example.

Teachers must prepare and submit a lesson plan to the observing teacher. The observing teacher fills out the form, which is then shared with the program administrator and the observed teacher after the observation.

Core Idea 3: Professional Development Meetings for Idea-Sharing

Teachers often informally share ideas with each other over lunch or in the teachers' room. In order to maximize this, though, it is important to give teachers the opportunity to formally share their teaching ideas with their peers. This can be done during regularly-scheduled teacher meetings, where every teacher is asked to come to the meeting with one activity idea to share with his or her fellow teachers. Meetings can also be specifically scheduled for idea-sharing.

One challenge that can arise from this core idea is that schools must be willing to compensate teachers for their time. However, you can schedule an idea share during an already-scheduled or required meeting, such as a yearly or monthly check-in, and then you are already compensating the teachers for this time. This can mean, however, that meetings could take a bit more time than originally planned. One more caveat is that one may find teachers can be territorial about sharing their tried-and-true activities with each other. One way to get around this issue is instead of sharing a game or activity, teachers could share a strategy for adapting or using the course book.

Core Idea 4: Regularly Scheduled PD Workshops

In our context, we host one to three 1-hour PDWs per month. This gives teachers a convenient and predictable source for PD. Teachers are asked to suggest topics and are polled for which topics would be of most use to them. Teachers are also invited to lead workshops on topics that interest them.

However, it can still be a struggle to build regular attendance. Consider compensating teachers for their time spent attending the PDWs and making attendance of a certain number of PDWs per year a requirement. This means that alternatives should be presented for those unable to attend the required number of PDWs. For example:

- Teachers may lead one PDW.
- Teachers may write a one-page summary of an academic article related to language teaching, which is then made available to the other teachers.
- Teachers may create a set of at least five classroom activities to be shared with other teachers.
- Teachers may attend a PDW at another location or attend a webinar (proof of attendance must be submitted).
- Teachers may record themselves teaching at least 1 hour of a lesson and write up a detailed summary/commentary/reflection of this lesson based on the video. This would then be submitted to a supervisor along with a formal lesson plan.
- Teachers may produce content (a blog post or a teaching tip video) for the school's website or a social media platform managed by the school.

Core Idea 5: Setting Up an Online Presence for PD

This can be done privately (using a site that will only be shared among the teachers at the school, like [Dropbox](#)) or publically (using a site that can be accessed by anyone, like Facebook). This can encourage teachers to seek PD on their own time using social networking sites and websites that they are comfortable and familiar with. In order to encourage and maintain the production of content, an administrator (or even a teacher) should be in charge of managing the site(s) your school is active on. In our context, it is an administrator's responsibility to curate, create, and post content. We make sure the teachers have access to the content and encourage (but don't require) the teachers to participate in the creation of content.

Dropbox is a great resource for sharing ideas privately among the teachers at the school. Set up a folder for each level offered and allow teachers to upload/download resources to share with each other. (See Figure 2.)

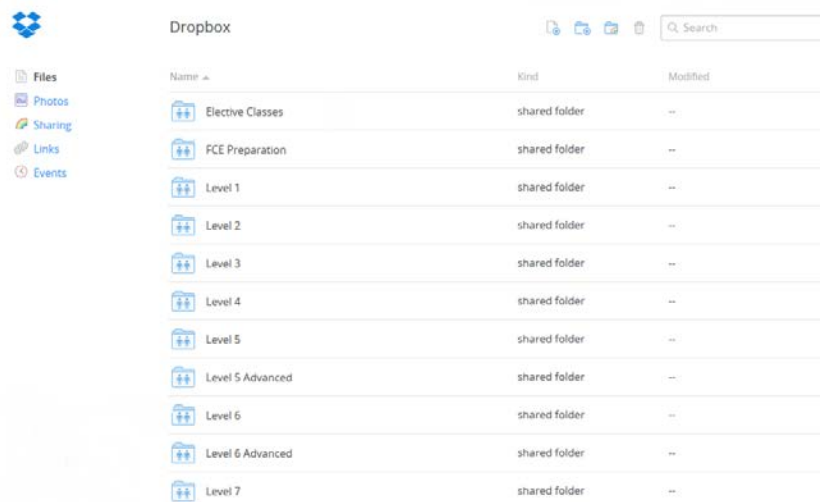


Figure 2. Dropbox for PD

In our context, we manage a YouTube channel ([TESOLatRennertNYC](#); see Figure 3), a Facebook page ([TESOL Certificate Programs at Rennert NYC](#)), a Wordpress blog ([TESOL at Rennert NYC](#); see Figure 4), and a Twitter feed ([@TESOLatRennert](#)) that our teachers can access for class ideas. Teachers can also offer to write blog posts or create videos, but this is not required.

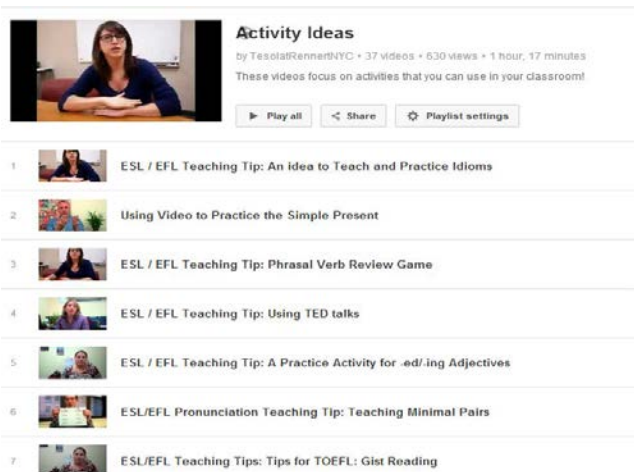


Figure 3. TESOL at Rennert NYC YouTube Channel.



Figure 4. TESOL at Rennert NYC Wordpress Blog.

To sum up, effective PD programs cater to the specific teaching context and needs of the teachers at the school. When thinking how to cater a program to the needs of the teachers, make sure to think about *who* drives the type of PD being offered. The greater variety that is offered, the more likely teachers will be to take part in the program. The core ideas in this article are a great jumping off point to maintaining a year-round PD program that leads to a school environment of community and collaboration.

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PRE-OBSERVATION MEETING WITH TEACHERS

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BROAD THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE

TEACHER NAME:	DATE:
LEVEL/PROGRAM:	OBSERVATION DATE:

1. Is there anything specific that you would like me to focus on during the observation?

2. Are you having any classroom management issues that you would like help with? If so, please explain.

3. Are you having problems with any specific student(s) that you would like advice on?

4. Please list any other questions below.

Teacher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Observer's Signature: _____

POST-OBSERVATION QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS



TEACHER NAME: _____

LEVEL/PROGRAM: _____

1. What were your learning objectives? Were they met (fully, partially, not at all)? How do you know? Provide specific examples.

2. Did you meet the needs of your students? How do you know?

3. Please make any other comments about your lesson below.



4. What kinds of Professional Development Workshops would you be interested in attending?

Teacher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Observer's Signature: _____



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Name of Observer: _____ **Teacher being observed:** _____

Date: _____ **Level/Program:** _____

Please complete the following when you are observing a class.

1. What were the learning objectives of the lesson? Were they met? How do you know?

2. How did the teacher help the students reach their objective(s)?

3. What did you like about the lesson?

4. What might you have done differently?

5. Describe the ratio of Teacher Talk Time vs. Student Talk Time. Was pair work used? Were other grouping strategies used? Explain and give examples.



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6. How was the board used? In what parts of the lesson and towards what objective? Give examples.

7. Were the lesson goals made clear to the students? How?

8. What aspects of the lesson or class were challenging for the teacher? How did the teacher deal with these challenges?

9. Did the teacher correct the students? How? Give examples.

10. Did the class keep your attention? How? Give examples.

11. Other comments/observations:
