

PLANNING A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

Teacher training and professional development opportunities do not need to be complicated or expensive. One simple resource for improving teaching and learning new methods for language teaching is fellow teachers. In most teaching contexts, teacher colleagues can offer a wealth of language teaching tips and suggestions that come from research, education, and teaching experience. This week, Teacher's Corner offers teacher trainers a way to utilize the resources and expertise available on site to coordinate a small, low-cost teaching workshop.

Teacher trainers see more enthusiasm and support for professional development activities when teachers choose and design the content. In this workshop, teacher trainers will ask on-site teachers to present a 10-minute teaching activity to their colleagues. In this design, all teachers are involved and given an opportunity to share something that aligns with their own language teaching interests or expertise.

THE WORKSHOP

This teaching workshop can be structured in a number of ways depending on the size of the school and the number of teachers. Here are a few ideas for organizing the workshop:

- For teacher trainers working in schools with more than 15 teachers, it may be best to organize sessions by language-teaching level and/or learner age. Instead of having one large workshop, plan to have several smaller, simultaneous workshops. In smaller schools with fewer than 15 teachers, a single workshop is possible.
- Schools that have a single level of language learners and a large number of teachers could divide the workshop sessions up by language skills.

This type of workshop can be made longer or shorter, but it should be scheduled at a time that works for all potential participants. Teacher trainers should find out if there are existing professional development days scheduled or if they would need to schedule the workshop during a shared free period in school when all teachers are available. Ideally, in this type of workshop, every teacher would be asked to participate.

Once the teacher trainer has identified how best to organize the workshop, he or she can put out a request to teachers for the upcoming workshop. Depending on the context, teacher trainers can begin by requesting that teachers prepare a 10-minute presentation on a language teaching activity they have used in their classes and feel confident in sharing. Teacher trainers may also want to specify topics, language skills, learner levels, or learner ages. Whatever the teacher trainer decides, the request must be clear: teachers will have 10 minutes to present a language-teaching activity. In the announcement, teacher trainers should include the time and date of the upcoming workshop and how it will be organized.

Organizing the workshop can depend on the number of teachers but could be similar to the following structure:

1. Teachers are grouped as one large group or into smaller groups, with a maximum of five people.
2. Each teacher in the group will have 10 minutes to present and a 2-3 minutes for questions at the end of the activity. This way a new teacher presents every 15 minutes and the whole workshop might only take 75 minutes.
3. Alternatively, five teachers could present at the same time, and other teachers could choose which session to attend. This structure might work best for a large group of teachers; however, keep in mind that transition time between one group of teachers presenting and the next group could add some time to the workshop.
4. Every 15 minutes, the organizer notifies participants to start the next session.

5. This type of workshop could go on for any number of hours, but after five presentations, it would be good to give participants a short break before another round of presentations begin.

It is also a good idea to send out the request to teachers a few weeks in advance so that they have time to plan their activities. Additionally, it is helpful to specify a due date by which teachers submit their topics to the teacher trainer or the workshop organizers before the workshop. Getting the topics in advance helps with the organization of the workshop and would also make it possible to print descriptions and schedules.

Other considerations for teacher trainers:

- Ensure there are enough rooms available with any necessary technology or teaching tools.
- If grouping teachers, have groups made up in advance and simply send each group to their designated rooms when they arrive.
- Remind teachers that they should bring whatever tools and materials necessary or request them in advance.
- Plan to have a clear way to notify participants that one activity has concluded and that it is time to move on to the next. For example, each room could have a designated person keeping time, or someone could walk past the rooms ringing a bell.
- Have all printed materials organized and ready to distribute when participants arrive.

This type of workshop is often well-received by teachers. Each teacher has a voice and gets to share something that he or she is confident in teaching. By using one of the best practices that language teachers use with their students, teacher trainers can create positive and exciting professional development opportunities for their teachers.