

Summary of the Plenary Speech

Reciprocal Transformations: What involvement in teacher development means to the facilitators

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The effects of teacher training and faculty development programs are often scrutinized via the focal point of their effects on audience participants. We do not usually examine the impacts these programs have on the volunteers who serve as faculty development facilitators. This presentation is based on the researcher's lead longitudinal investigations regarding the professional, pedagogical, and personal changes that take place in the lives of volunteer teacher trainers and faculty development presenters who have participated in one or more Teachers Helping Teachers (THT) programs.

Teachers Helping Teachers is a special interest group of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT). THT was formed in 2004 with volunteers based primarily in Japan and, as its mission, aims to aid fellow educators in the Asia Pacific region and the beyond. Primarily working in Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, the Philippines, Nepal, and Kyrgyzstan, THT has put on approximately 50 teacher training programs since 2005, working with over 8,000 in-service and preservice teachers and employing the efforts of approximately 100 volunteer facilitators in the process.

Teachers Helping Teachers fulfills its mission by providing teacher-development workshops that “. . . exhibit practical, student and teacher friendly approaches to English education that are informed by current research in the field” (Dougherty, 2005, p. 2). A report on a program put on in Mindoro Oriental, the Philippines, described the organization of a THT set of workshops, where volunteer facilitators make presentations and conduct workshops that “. . . mix theory with practice and keep the interests and needs of working teachers always in mind (THT Website, 2020).” In 2008, with the interest of granting THT a firm footing and position from which to grow in the future, the organization joined with JALT as a Special Interest Group. This also allowed THT to gain non-profit status in Japan.

Below is a description of a typical THT conference program (Laurier & Morel, 2017 p. 44):

A typical THT trip involves Japan-based teachers volunteering their time to go to a selected country and making two or three presentations usually on teaching techniques that are appropriate for the audiences. These range from elementary teachers to university teachers, with various levels of training and expertise. The one thing they all have in common is a desire to learn more about teaching.... Occasionally there are opportunities for volunteer teachers to observe classes and even teach a class or two. Volunteers normally pay for their travel and lodging while visiting the countries.

This plenary will be comprised of the results of an anonymous, open call, online survey of THT volunteers bolstered by separate in-depth interviews of additional volunteers. Data was gathered over the course of nearly a decade of teacher development programs hosted in Bangladesh, Laos, Vietnam, Nepal, the Philippines, and Kyrgyzstan. Specifically, the professional, pedagogical, and personal impacts of experiencing being a THT volunteer workshop facilitator have been examined. What has been found is that there is a wealth of benefits accrued in each of these categories.

For the professional impact of volunteering as a THT faculty development facilitator or presenter, the data points to extrinsic benefits that include increasing the possibilities for cross-cultural understanding and peaceful existence, allowing the volunteers to expand their circle of professional connections, and assist them with achieving career goals of employment or advancement. Pedagogical impacts included having the opportunity to weigh one's own teaching context against possibly more challenging contexts in other countries. Additionally, volunteers felt that they had learned from both other THT volunteers and from program attendees. Volunteers were able to receive information about new teaching techniques or methodologies that they were able to apply to their own teaching. Additionally, the experience of volunteering as a THT workshop facilitator or presenter encouraged volunteers to give more thought to their own lesson planning and preparation, and it encouraged them to be more careful in staging and scaffolding their lessons. Regarding the personal impacts of being a THT volunteer, respondents identified the opportunities to travel as something other than a tourist, the chance to meet locals in unique settings, and the chance to expand their own world views as some of the personal benefits of being a volunteer.

That these results were consistent over the course of more than a decade is significant in that this indicates the reliability of the findings. Across the history of the organization, THT volunteers found benefit in their service, profiting both intrinsically and extrinsically from serving as a THT facilitator. The results of this study have myriad uses, but the authors feel that the key uses benefit both the individual and the organization. These results may

provide those interested in volunteering, and certainly those who are keen to convince others to volunteer, grist for the mill for their arguments in favor of service. Additionally, it is sincerely hoped that the results offered will be useful for those tasked with creating, maintaining, or expanding similar teacher training programs in the future. It is a simple truth that without attracting and maintaining an enthusiastic pool of volunteers, organizations like Teachers Helping Teachers would not be able to exist.

References:

Dougherty, Patrick (2005) *Teachers Helping Teachers*. Himeji, Japan: Akita JALT

Laurier, J. & Morel, R. (2017) Teachers Helping Teachers. *The Language Teacher*, 41.4, July/August, pp. 43 – 44.

Teachers Helping Teachers (December 10, 2022) www.tht-japan.org/