Recognizing Teacher Well-being as Essential for Professional Development: Lessons Learned from Collaborating with Teachers at a Private Tutoring Center in China

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Abstract: Many educators are required to further their knowledge and skills through professional development initiatives. These programs are affected by numerous elements. A crucial but often overlooked factor is the well-being of teachers. This qualitative case study explores how acknowledging the well-being of two participants and addressing their needs influenced their involvement in a professional development initiative. These educators worked on developing their pedagogical knowledge and practices related to reading instruction for students learning English as a foreign language. Recognizing these participants' well-being necessitated being cognizant of whether they were in a healthy place. This awareness emerged from direct observations of lessons, interviews with teachers, and the journey maps they created and narrated. The participants voiced concerns about how to engage with this program independently. They also had to contend with contextual factors that regulated how they responded to and progressed through this program. Appreciating these aspects of their affective states led to a calibrated approach to support and guidance based on the unique needs of each participant. When they received assistance tailored to their needs, these teachers were better positioned to benefit.

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Professional development initiatives are an opportunity to positively affect the work teachers do. They are conceived as a chance for educators to enhance their knowledge and skills (Falecki & Mann, 2021). These teachers, however, work in multifaceted environments that affect how they proceed through such programs. Consideration by professional development facilitators of teachers asked to go through these initiatives is a necessary aspect of developing and implementing such projects to ensure they prove beneficial to participants.

One of the most salient factors influencing teachers is their affective states. These individuals contend with numerous emotions as they complete their duties. They confront the unpredictability of life and are unaware of what they will feel at any given moment (Babic et al., 2022; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). That is the reality of being human. For individuals in education, however, that normal state of *being* is not always acknowledged or appreciated (Mercer, 2023). This sentiment stems from working in contexts with multiple stakeholders who have distinct ideas of how educators are to engage with their work. Many administrators, parents/caregivers, and students emphasize the duties expected of teachers and disregard how they feel (Fullan et al., 2015; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Professional development facilitators are one group of stakeholders who might neglect the people they are meant to help in favor of focusing on the tasks related to furthering the knowledge and skills of teachers.

Yet, these educators are people who experience life with all its unexpectedness. Research on teacher metacognition has shown that their emotions affect pedagogic choices (Hiver et al., 2021). The decisions teachers make in the classroom emerge from combining what they know as academically best for their students with the unique circumstances that occur during lessons (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). The quality of their teaching is not just based on their training and wealth of knowledge; it is also based on their well-being and the effort they are able and willing to exert for their students (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020).

My awareness of the importance of teacher well-being emerged in my doctoral research as I collaborated with educators at private English supplementary tutoring centers in southern China. This work occurred as part of an action research dissertation designed to facilitate the learning and development of participants. My goal with this project was to understand how teachers could develop the pedagogic knowledge needed to instruct guided reading lessons to students learning English as a foreign language. In this regard, two research questions guided my work:

1. How does the professional development program I initiated influence teachers' instruction related to reading in English as a foreign language?
2. How do my actions affect teachers in this process of learning and applying what they learn from the professional development program?

As I collaborated with participants, I became aware that addressing their well-being was crucial for the success of this project. Their affective states influenced not only how they thought about the work we did together but also how they engaged with it as a professional development opportunity. To elucidate why recognizing teacher well-being was essential in the program I initiated, I first present contextual information regarding teacher well-being within private supplementary tutoring centers. Next, I describe the initiative the teachers undertook and explain the methodology I used for my research. Subsequently, I share the findings of this study regarding how consideration of teachers' well-being affected the project, followed by a discussion of those findings. I conclude with my final thoughts.

Background and Context

Teacher Well-Being in Private Supplementary Tutoring Centers

Teachers are a conglomeration of their experiences and knowledge, but how they apply that knowledge to their work is a metacognitive act (Hiver et al., 2021). Teacher's metacognition focuses on how teachers adapt their thoughts and behaviors within their contexts (Hiver et al., 2021). It encompasses multiple aspects of themselves that are constantly at play in the decisions they enact moment to moment, every day, in their interactions with students, administrators, parents/caregivers, and others in their work environment. This process incorporates the logical and emotional components of the self (Babic et al., 2022). How teachers feel at any moment influences the decisions they make. Even though teachers may know they should take specific actions in their work, their feelings about those actions can vary based on contextual factors present at the time of decision-making (Hiver et al., 2021). What educators feel comfortable doing one day can change the next. The mood of one class can influence what they do compared to another class. While teachers may logically understand what they should do, their actions are influenced by these factors unique to specific moments and how they feel as they make decisions.

This state of being human encompasses teachers' well-being. Mercer and Gregersen (2020) define well-being as "the experience of mental and physical health, including having a sense of life satisfaction, meaning, purpose, and social connection" (p. 136). This multifaceted definition reflects the complexity of being human and how our emotional and physical well-being affects every moment. Acknowledging the well-being of teachers is an act of recognizing the complexity involved with being a human in an environment where they continuously enact metacognitive acts that affect their students and themselves.

For teachers working at private tutoring centers, they face challenges that impact their well-being and how they conduct their work. The for-profit nature of these centers has led to administrators prioritizing maintaining and increasing their profit margins (Bray & Zhang, 2023). Teachers are expected to teach lessons of high caliber, cater to the needs of parents/caregivers and students, promote the organization through marketing campaigns, and assist with enrollment and renewal drives (Liu & Sammons, 2021; Xiong et al., 2022; Yung, 2019). While these tasks are considered standard procedures for teachers, increasing disturbances to this equilibrium have greatly affected them as well. From 2020 to 2022, governments worldwide implemented protocols that affected how education institutions were managed and how lessons were taught due to COVID-19 (Tang, 2023). Many teachers at private tutoring centers were required to teach online without sufficient time to plan or familiarize themselves with the different tools they were expected to use (Talidong & Toquero, 2021). This situation left many teachers feeling uncertain about the effectiveness of their lessons and the learning gains of their students (Gao & Zhang, 2020; Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021).

This reality has deep ramifications for teachers and how they experience their jobs. For those working at private tutoring centers, professional development can positively affect their well-being within the workplace (Babic et al., 2022; Mercer, 2021, 2023). The growth in their knowledge and skills can help educators develop a sense of personal betterment. Mercer (2023) encountered such a situation while working with teachers in the private sector of Malta. Some of the teachers in this study experienced positive work conditions. Managers of these teachers encouraged them to develop their professional skills and knowledge and offered opportunities

within the institution or provided funding for continued learning and development elsewhere. As a result, these teachers felt positive about their work and their relationships with administrators. Many chose to continue to work for these institutions for multiple years.

Conversely, the absence of these opportunities also impacts educators. Pan and Zhou (2023) reported on teachers in China who felt discouraged within their work context. From observations and interviews, they learned that administrators at private tutoring centers saw teachers as expendable and chose not to invest in their professional development. As a result, they overworked their teachers until many were too exhausted to continue. These teachers felt discouraged and reported low motivation for continuing to teach at their respective institutions. Trent (2016) shared similar insights regarding teachers at private tutoring centers in Hong Kong. These teachers identified the absence of opportunities to discuss English pedagogy, plan lessons collaboratively, and develop learning communities as negatively affecting their approach to work. The absence of such opportunities proved frustrating, as these teachers wished to build and enhance their knowledge and skills.

Professional development opportunities within private tutoring can influence teachers and how they relate to their work. The presence or absence of these initiatives affects teachers' well-being and their engagement with their duties. Incorporating professional development opportunities is an important consideration in fostering a positive work environment for teachers at private tutoring centers, especially given the stressful nature of their work.

The Professional Development Initiative

To help alleviate the concerns teachers in my organization had about reading instruction for students learning English as a foreign language, I initiated a program to assist them in developing their knowledge and skills. I asked those who participated to use an innovation configurations map for reading instruction to better recognize what was involved in the reading curriculum and how they could implement it (Hall & Hord, 2020; Hord et al., 2006). The organization's curriculum team divided the document into six configurations they deemed important for a balanced reading lesson: prior knowledge, vocabulary, reading skills and strategies, reading comprehension, class discussion, and written responses. Each configuration contained four to nine components. These components, when taken together, provided participants with information the curriculum team considered necessary for implementing that configuration. Each component was further subdivided into three to six variations, ranging from the ideal to the nonideal, outlining how individuals could enact it. The curriculum team based the contents of the map on personal experiences teaching similar classes, previous observations, interviews with teachers, and research from the relevant literature. See Figure 1 for an example of the beginning of an innovation configuration.

Figure 1
Beginning of the Reading Comprehension Instruction Configuration

04. Innovation Configuration for Reading Comprehension Instruction

Reading Comprehension: After reading a text, readers can understand the author's purpose and the main idea. They can summarize the information learned. They are also able to synthesize the information with prior knowledge.

Component 1: Provides opportunities for students to read the target text multiple times in a variety of ways.					
A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**
Provides opportunities for students to read the text more than two times during the class using different, effective methods.	Provides opportunities for students to read the text two times during the class using different, effective methods.	Provides opportunities for students to read the text-only one time during the class using an effective method.	Provides opportunities for students to read the text two or more times during the class, but uses the same effective method.	Provides opportunities for students to read the text more than once but uses a mix of effective and ineffective methods.	Provides opportunities for students to read the text more than once but uses ineffective methods.

The goal of the innovation configurations map was to help teachers discern what they needed to include in their lessons and what implementation would look like in practice. This information would provide teachers with the opportunity to reflect on and plan how they could improve their instruction (Hord et al., 2006). Participating teachers collaborated on the map with fellow participants and worked alongside an experienced guide who mentored and supported them as they worked on the innovation configurations map.

Methodology

To understand the impressions teachers had regarding this program, I conducted a qualitative case study with teachers at two centers as part of my doctoral research (Yin, 2018). This broader study involved examining in detail the process they went through to develop their knowledge and skills as part of that initiative. As the project progressed, I became conscious of the importance of the participants' well-being and their affective states. This awareness informed my understanding of the link between the well-being of teachers and professional development. Recognizing this importance emerged from my collaboration with those who participated. For this paper, I share the experiences of two teachers at one of those centers.

Participants

From January to early July 2022, I worked with teachers at an English private tutoring center in southern China. After I received institutional review board approval and permission from this organization's administration, I asked the four teachers at the center if they were interested in participating. I met with all four teachers to explain the program and what they

could expect, and I addressed any questions they had. Two of the teachers agreed to participate as key participants. Each signed a consent form and returned it to me. We then established a schedule for when and how often we would meet. For each key participant, I assigned a pseudonym to help protect their identity.

Key Participant 1: Ash

The first key participant I collaborated with was Ash, who worked as a headteacher. Originally from the United Kingdom, Ash had a background in theater, with experience as both an actor and drama teacher. He also earned a master's degree in drama. He started teaching English first in northwestern China and later in southern China at private supplementary tutoring centers. He worked at these centers for nearly two years before he took up his position as headteacher. At the start of this project, Ash had worked at this center for eight months.

Key Participant 2: Elliot

The second key participant I collaborated with was Elliot, who worked as a senior teacher. Like Ash, Elliot hailed from the United Kingdom. Her background was in nutrition sciences, and she earned a master's degree in this field. She entered the field of English language teaching when she began working on a joint British-Chinese program at a university in southern China. For three years, she participated in this program as a biochemistry instructor, teaching English to support her primary courses. At the end of this project, Elliot chose to remain in China and sought employment at the center involved in this study. She had worked at this center for six months at the start of this project.

Methods

Understanding how Ash and Elliot learned to use and apply the innovation configurations map required me to utilize a variety of methods. I collected data from three primary sources: direct observations of lessons, interviews with key participants following those observations, and a journey map that each participant created and narrated at the end of the project. Employing these methods ensured I gained a clear sense of their progression. See Figure 2 for the frequency and relative dates when I collected each strand of data.

Direct Observation

Observations occurred once every three to four weeks. I observed Ash and Elliot as they taught their respective reading lessons, conducting a total of six direct observations for each participant. I sat for the entire duration of either a 45-minute virtual lesson or a 90-minute in-person lesson. The medium used for a lesson was based on COVID-19 requirements at the time of the observation. During these lessons, I focused on the teachers as they taught their students. For each lesson, I used the innovation configurations map to identify which configurations and components the teachers were enacting in their reading lessons (Blamey et al., 2012). I then assigned a variation for each identified component. I took brief notes during each observation and completed my detailed notes within a day. I later shared these notes with the participants before our scheduled interviews.

Interview

Within a week of each observation, I interviewed each key participant about what had happened in the class. By the end of the study, I had met Ash and Elliot six times each to discuss their lessons. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Speaking with each participant allowed me to learn their thought process in using the innovation configurations map from their perspectives (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). We began with the teachers answering questions about how they used the innovation configurations in their planning, how they implemented it in class, and their thoughts about how well they used the innovation configurations during their lesson. We also discussed any issues or concerns they had. Throughout our discussions, I shared my thoughts based on the observation notes or what the key participants had shared in our talks. These meetings were recorded after I received consent from the participants.

Figure 2
Frequency of Data Collection from January to July 2022
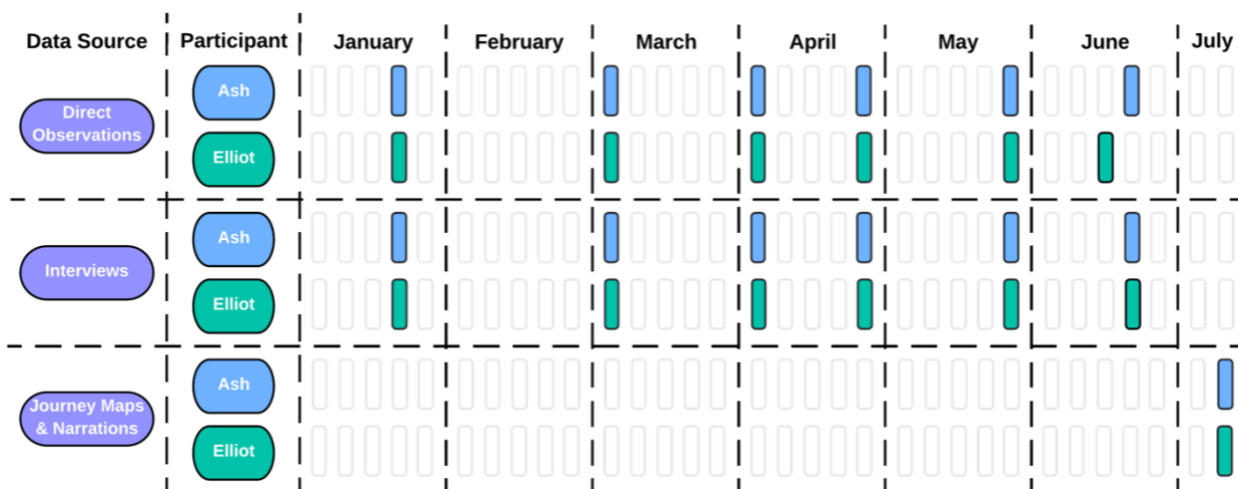
Journey Map and Narration

In early July, I asked participants to create a journey map reflecting their involvement with this project (see Figures 3 and 4). These maps allowed Ash and Elliot to visually depict their experiences and reflect on the learning paths they took throughout the study (Futch & Fine, 2014). I shared a general prompt for creating the map with each participant and asked them to take a week to complete it. I also informed them that we would review their maps during a summative interview at the end of that week. When we met, each participant and I spent about one hour discussing their journey map. Ash and Elliot first shared their maps and narrated their journeys. Each participant described their experiences with the program, the people and tools that supported or hindered them, the challenges they faced, and the lessons they learned. At the end of their narrations, I asked follow-up questions to learn more about different aspects of their maps or narrations. These narrations and discussions were recorded after I received consent from each participant.

Figure 3
Journey Map Ash Created and Shared at the Conclusion of the Project

Figure 4
Journey Map Elliot Created and Shared at the Conclusion of the Project

Data Analysis

Concurrent with data collection, I began data analysis. Throughout this process, I wrote memos to help me think about the data and findings. I used MAXQDA 2020 to organize and explore the data. For all recorded data, I first transcribed the recordings using Otter.ai to create an initial transcript, which I then uploaded into MAXQDA 2020. I listened to the audio recordings multiple times to refine the transcripts. Additionally, I uploaded my notes and participants' journey maps onto MAXQDA 2020.

Once all the information was organized and cleaned, I began the first of three coding rounds (Saldaña, 2021). In the first round, I coded each strand of data to highlight the actions and inactions of participants using process and in vivo codes. An example process code for a participant's action included "using a pedagogically robust method." An example vivo code for a participant's inactions included "I'm not sure what to do." I then reviewed these initial codes to assess their relevance and appropriateness, making adjustments when necessary. For example, I consolidated codes when they were similar in content. In the second round, I looked through initial codes to identify the most frequent codes to develop focused codes. This second round of coding allowed me to develop tentative categories for use across the different data sources. This involved a recursive process of refining and reducing categories while assessing their applicability to the data. In the final coding round, I finalized the list of categories and tested them against all data strands to ensure their durability. The final categories included the Affective States of Participants, Teacher Metacognition, Teacher-Student Dynamics, and the Researcher's Role. Once these categories were finalized, I used them to understand how the participants used the innovation configurations map.

I additionally sought outside perspectives to review my analysis and findings. I asked the participants if they wished to review my analysis and discuss their thoughts or concerns. I aimed to give them the opportunity to review my interpretation of their words and actions, so I might better represent them in my study. However, none of the participants accepted this offer. I also had three outside scholars review my work as I finalized my analysis and findings. They provided insights into their understanding of the data, asked questions to clarify points they had, and provided suggestions for further review or reporting. One of these scholars, for example, recommended highlighting the emotional content of the data.

Their observations led me to look over the data once more. With their ideas percolating in my mind, I reassessed the significance of the participants' well-being throughout the project and how I engaged with them. As I became conscious of how important their well-being affected them, I also realized I had modified my actions to better address their needs during our collaboration. Being mindful of how their well-being shaped their involvement with the project became a crucial aspect of how we moved forward to complete the project. To explain how I reached this conclusion, I share the experiences of Ash and Elliot in the following section.

Findings

Ash and Elliot's initial foray into working with the innovation configurations map required them to learn how to use it in ways that met their needs. Their progress in that endeavor proved challenging. Ash and Elliot's concerns about the innovation configurations map affected them at the start of the project. They also had to deal with contextual factors that influenced them in unpredictable ways. In contrast to these challenges was the level of support and guidance each

participant received, which affected their experiences. Ash and Elliot needed to deal with these concerns multiple times as they worked to achieve their desired outcome with this project. To help them move forward, they needed someone who could assist them while being mindful of their needs.

Concerns with a Novel Initiative

Professional development initiatives are typically imposed by outsiders to develop educators (Hall & Hord, 2020). Participants in such programs may feel unsure about their value and overwhelmed with information (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). When Ash and Elliot first learned about this program, they felt wary of its usefulness. Part of their concerns stemmed from their prior experiences with professional development, training, and onboarding programs. Ash, for example, expressed skepticism about whether this initiative would prove beneficial. Ash explained:

> But just from previous experiences, I genuinely was a bit apprehensive if this was going to be helpful. And that was nothing against you, or [the organization]. … I am now very thankful that I joined. And I think it's a shame that other people didn't. Because I can imagine other people didn't join because they [had] the same … thoughts.

Elliot, conversely, felt overwhelmed regarding the amount of information presented in the innovation configurations map. Upon seeing the map for the first time, she shared in her journey map narration, "There's just so much to look through that it can seem a bit overwhelming at first." For the foundation of her journey map, Elliot used a maze as both a design motif and an underlying metaphor for her journey. She commented, "But just if you weren't here, it would literally be like this maze, except I wouldn't have found any way through it." Elliot felt that had she had to decipher and interpret the innovation configurations map without help, she might have been unable to do so. For both Ash and Elliot, then, they felt some trepidation about the utility of this initiative and how best to start.

While Ash and Elliot had concerns about the efficacy of this program and how to use the innovation configurations map, they also felt a responsibility to develop themselves as educators. Professional development programs may serve as a source of growth and development for teachers (Hall & Hord, 2020). They may embrace such initiatives for professional satisfaction as well (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Ash felt a personal need to improve so he could better instruct his students. During his education journey map narration, Ash shared:

> The pressure from me on me, because I know that I want it to get to, and also, like, I feel because I am … headteacher, now regional headteacher, that I should be of a certain level already. You know? Whether that's right or wrong, that's what I feel.

This concern about ensuring he developed professionally influenced Ash's initial foray into this project. The desire Ash and the other participants felt to improve also affected how they initially understood how to use the innovation configurations map. As Elliot recounted, "When I saw it … I was like, 'Oh, my gosh, this is so, so much. Like, how am I …. I'm not even doing any of this.' I think, like, I don't do any of it." Upon looking at the map for the first time, Elliot felt as if she needed to enact all the content as described. She felt anxious based on her estimation that she was not applying the contents of the map to her lessons. That feeling left her in a state of uncertainty about how to proceed. While Ash and Elliot felt it necessary to develop their

pedagogical practices, they were unsure how they could accomplish such a task by using the innovation configurations map.

Ash and Eliot began this project with concerns about its usefulness and how to proceed with using the innovation configurations map. Their initial affective states left them predisposed to take a wait-and-see approach. They needed time to determine the efficacy of this project, as well as whether it was too much for them to carry out effectively. Yet, they also felt an internal desire to succeed and better themselves for their students. But when left alone to decipher the innovation configurations map, they felt apprehensive about how they could use it. These internal conditions affected them, but external factors influenced them as well.

Contextual Effects

The context individuals are in shapes their emotional state and how they approach their everyday lives (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Novel professional development initiatives disrupt the normal routine educators have established, which influences their motivation and the level of effort they are willing to exert on such programs (Hall & Hord, 2020). When extraordinary events occur, they exasperate educators' emotional states, and their willingness to engage with such programs may wax and wane.

For Ash and Elliot, factors related to COVID-19 in their respective communities complicated their use of the map. At the beginning of 2022, city officials responded to an increasing number of COVID-19 cases in different neighborhoods with policies that locked individuals within their homes and required private tutoring centers to institute emergency remote teaching. Both these requirements impacted the participants and how they approached learning about and applying the innovation configurations map.

The effects of these policies for each participant varied due to unique circumstances. Elliot's experience with the lockdown and emergency remote teaching impacted her physically and mentally. Elliot stated:

> I'm on a lockdown currently as well. It's been like day six so far and I think you may have noticed that I've just been rocking a bit back and forth during this class because normally I would just go to the gym in the mornings, and like do the treadmill, but I feel like I'm getting antsy from not doing so much, like not being active. I'm getting lower back pain and it's like, "Oh my gosh! I need to do something." Gosh. It feels like being in prison.

Just as being in lockdown affected Elliot personally, it also affected her professionally. In our second interview, we discussed how she used the innovation configurations map for the observed lesson. She explained:

> If I'm being completely honest … I've not really been able to apply it much because everything's been online, and many classes were canceled, and ... I guess I didn't think about applying it to all the [guided reading] classes, because, yeah, for no reason. I guess I could do that just to put it into practice. I guess.

For the first two and half months of this project, Elliot's classes were irregularly scheduled. Many parents choose not to have their children attend online lessons, which led to the cancellation of many of her classes. When they did occur, sudden changes upended her plans. In one of the observed classes, only one student attended. Elliot learned of this change minutes

before the beginning of the lesson. As the lesson progressed, she continuously modified it. In the post-observation interview, Elliott shared with me her uncertainties:

> I guess I just thought am I doing the right thing with one student here? Like is there more that I could be doing? Were there any awkward moments? Did I misinterpret anything? Did I rush the student at all? Did I guess ... what was I doing wrong?

Her concerns affected how she viewed her work and how she was progressing in this professional development program.

Uncertainties during this period influenced pedagogic decisions as well. Ash expressed his apprehensions in our third interview about how he initially taught students synchronously online. Regarding silence in the lesson, he shared, "It's easier to monitor in a face-to-face class. So, I think sometimes I ... When I first started online teaching, having silence online is more uncomfortable than having silence in class." Being unsure of how to deal with silence online affected Ash and the pedagogical decisions he made. Teaching online also influenced how Ash and Elliot applied the innovation configurations map via the online platform the organization used for lessons. Lessons were reduced from 90 minutes to 45 minutes, and the online tools required them to modify activities. Elliot, during this time, focused on the configuration related to how students read a text during a lesson. There are numerous ways teachers may have students read that are motivating and beneficial to their learning development (Grifhorst et al., 2012). Elliot, however, felt constrained by the online medium and what her students could do concerning how they approached reading texts. The choices she considered appropriate were not always well received by her students, which then affected her. In our third interview, she shared,

> But others, obviously, … they didn't read it. The others who are just kind of not as interested didn't do that. So there are times where it did get a bit frustrating. I found that sometimes online classes, kind of, I can feel my blood boiling sometimes. And I'm like, "Okay, calm down."

Elliot chose to read texts online based on her understanding of how best to involve her students using this medium. The lack of engagement from her students, however, triggered an emotional response from Elliot that left her feeling upset. The experiences Ash and Elliot had with emergency remote teaching affected them as educators. Teaching online with students proved challenging in how they planned and taught lessons, the decisions they made on how to use the innovation configurations map, and how they engaged students during those lessons.

For Elliot and Ash, the effects of lockdowns and emergency remote teaching impacted how they participated in this professional development program. Their anxiety, frustrations, and concerns during this period affected them and how they responded to their work. To manage this situation and to engage with the innovation configurations map, they needed to receive support and guidance that responded to their needs.

Tailored Support and Guidance

When I asked Ash and Elliot to join this program, I initially focused on how they could help me and what technical skills and knowledge they might develop. Their well-being and fluidic contextual situations were an ancillary matter. As we continued to work together, I became aware of how their well-being was a central concern. As we collaborated and developed a rapport, Ash and Elliot began to seek my help and support. My role gradually shifted from one

I initially envisioned as a curriculum developer helping teachers to one more aligned with a mentor-mentee relationship.

As we worked together, the participants saw I was tailoring my feedback and advice based on what they said they needed instead of me imposing my ideas on them. For example, Ash noted this approach proved useful in helping him work through answers that were meaningful for him. He explained:

> You have a calming effect, I think, which is nice. And you are the guide who's showing the way. … You could help point in the direction, or we've had like a discussion where we can figure something out. … It's been like, kind of, okay, I've got a question, then you ask the question back, and then it leads to, you know, that moment. And I think also, again, … the reason I chose like a guru, instead of like a teacher figure, is sometimes a guru's job is to make you look back at yourself to then get the answer with you asking questions.

I aimed to support and guide Ash and Elliot in ways they asked for and that I thought would prove beneficial. We negotiated this role over time as we mutually learned about each other's needs and how we could best interact with one another.

One area where the participants' actions and thoughts indicated a hindrance to their participation in this project emerged from the experiences related to COVID-19. Lockdowns and emergency remote teaching were two of the main incidents influencing participants. I realized we had to address them to ensure they were in the right frame of mind for working with the innovation configurations map. As we developed our relationship, I opened myself to whatever avenue of discussion they wished to talk about. Providing them a forum to share their concerns, vent their frustrations, or talk about their general well-being allowed them to decompress. Elliot, for example, needed this opportunity due to her frustrations about emergency remote teaching. Ash also needed a space to vent his frustrations. I offered them an outlet because I wanted them to be in the right frame of mind to ensure they benefited from the work we did. Elliot explained in her journey map interview, "And it's like, [our work is] a space where you feel comfortable talking about things. And I felt comfortable talking about my teaching with you." That feeling of safety was important for our collaborative efforts. Being receptive to my advice and suggestions emerged from being aware of their well-being. With that awareness, we could better work together productively.

How I interacted with the teachers also affected their experiences with this project. Elliot mentioned in her journey map narration how I influenced her. She commented that I helped her better understand herself as a teacher and what she wanted to accomplish. As she said:

> There are just so many ways that are possible … to do things the right way. Like, it's not that a million things are wrong, and one or two ways are right. It's like a million things are right if done in a certain way.

Elliot identified me as someone who could support her and sought my advice to receive the assistance she needed to move forward. Ash also expressed a similar sentiment:

> I had a bad day here, and it was so much work. … And it was kind of like, this is, it's too much. Well, I'm going to have to start saying no. And this is when we talked about different things, you know … The reason I put it in this section, because even though I was having this pressure, you did help alleviate stuff like that. And especially like, obviously, I know, there's only so much within your control. But the … this program, the

pressure that maybe I felt before this, you know, our first interview, immediately went away, you know, so I have pressure in other parts, but that was gone.

Ash's stress related to his work duties affected both him and his general well-being. However, his participation in this project and his interactions with me helped alleviate some of the pressure he felt. Attaining this level of trust required learning what Ash and Elliot needed and considering their well-being throughout the project.

In calibrating my approach to focus on the needs of Ash and Elliot, I emphasized ensuring they reached a positive frame of mind for their engagement with this initiative. I was there to offer knowledge, support, and guidance as they needed it throughout the project. How they used the innovation configurations map, and their willingness to do so, emerged from my work with them through their trepidations, giving them concrete ideas, providing insights we developed collaboratively, and experiencing different ways of using the innovation configurations map in their classes.

My job as the facilitator of this project was to provide them with assistance and advice so they could achieve those aims. Professional development programs are ideally designed to meet the needs of participants (Hall & Hord, 2020). For individuals to gain from these initiatives, they need to be in the right mindset that empowers them to meet their goals. At the end of the program, Ash and Elliot took ownership of the innovation configurations map and made it their own. To reach that outcome, however, I needed to consider how their well-being affected their participation.

Discussion

The professional development project I initiated for my doctoral study emerged from my aspiration to help teachers develop as reading instructors. While I understood from the beginning that they would need guidance and support, I was naïve in how I conceptualized what that would involve. I focused on the technical aspects of this project and what teachers would need to know and do. However, I neglected to consider how each participant's affective states and general well-being would influence them (Babic et al., 2022; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). Both our collaborative work and actively listening to what they shared as their needs proved consequential in how Ash and Elliot progressed. Their well-being influenced how they approached and thought about this project, as well as how they moved forward.

Ash and Elliot came to this project with an open mind, though, they had concerns. They shared their trepidations about what they would gain from this project and the best way for them to engage with the innovation configurations map and me. They faced daunting contextual events that affected them. Lockdowns and emergency remote teaching due to government-issued COVID-19 edicts influenced their affective states. As they progressed through the roughly six and a half months of this project, they experienced unease about how successful they were in using the innovation configurations map. To help them work through these concerns, I needed to develop my awareness of how best to engage each participant. It required an understanding that these teachers were multifaceted with numerous factors influencing their decisions at every moment (Golombek, 2015; Hiver et al., 2021; Song, 2016). Ash and Elliot needed me to recognize them as individuals and listen to what they said they needed through their words and actions. Near the end of the project, Ash and Elliot commented in interviews and their journey map narrations how they appreciated being seen as people and how that positively affected them.

That recognition of their humanity proved consequential for them and what they accomplished with this project.

Reaching that outcome emerged from recognizing the participating teachers and their unique needs. For those who implement programs meant to benefit teachers, listening to these educators and working to understand their concerns is critical (Hall & Hord, 2020). They are the ones who are tasked with making changes to their practices and ideas about teaching. While many teachers may embrace change, others may not. These educators need support and guidance that considers how they feel about these programs (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020). This support and guidance, however, need to be tailored to the requirements of each teacher. Those who implement such programs should respond in ways that respect these teachers. Incorporating the well-being of teachers and ways of addressing their needs in project designs can prove consequential in whether teachers are willing to exert the effort to implement these initiatives (Hall & Hord, 2020). Including time for tiny chats with teachers to share their concerns is an example of a small act that can be incorporated in the planning of such initiatives (Golombek, 2022; Hall & Hord, 2020). These talks can provide insights into how teachers are engaging with the initiative and how, in more formal encounters, these concerns can be addressed expeditiously and respectfully. During scheduled discussions, providing a space to discuss ancillary matters can also benefit participants. Teachers are affected by their contexts. They may need the opportunity to share how these outside factors impact their actions and motivation. These ideas are based on the basic premise that for professional development initiatives to be successful, those asked to make changes are listened to and supported. They are the ones meant to benefit from such programs; as such, they should take precedence.

This switch in mindset from a focus on the initiative itself to those actively involved in implementing it represents a shift toward focusing on individuals. It is a call to elevate their needs over those of program designers and implementers. While those who fund and mandate these changes are an important aspect of any activity system, they are generally not the ones tasked with making changes to their practices. With the intent of professional development programs being to enhance the knowledge and skills of educators (Falecki & Mann, 2021), focusing these initiatives on how they navigate that process is critical for their success. Implementers, thus, would benefit from taking an inquisitive stance to understand participants and finding ways of addressing their needs as they arise (Hall & Hord, 2020).

Through trial and error, I learned of this importance with the initiative I spearheaded. While my initial focus was on gathering data for my dissertation, what proved consequential was what Ash and Elliot gained from their participation. They came into this project with questions and concerns about whether it would prove beneficial. As they progressed, they began to see constructive developments in the areas they had identified for their goals. By the end of the project, they had a positive outlook on the work we did together and what they gained from their participation. That outcome resulted from the work these two teachers were willing to put in, given the challenges they faced within their contexts. Providing these teachers with the intellectual and emotional support they needed proved necessary in ensuring they reached their goals. This required me to shift my focus from me to them. Their well-being became integral to the success of this project.

Considerations Regarding the Study

While I report on only two individuals who went through this project, their experiences highlight the importance of considering their well-being as they navigated this professional development program. Learning from them has helped me develop an awareness that everyone has specific needs (Tracy, 2010). Additionally, learning from the experiences of others within similar contexts may help develop a fuller understanding of teachers' experience with using the innovation configurations map for reading instruction. Equally important is working with teachers over a longer period, as professional development initiatives require multiple years for them to take hold (Hall & Hord, 2020).

Much work remains in exploring how teachers can use the innovation configurations map. From my collaboration with Ash and Elliot, there is much potential in using this document. For that work to prove meaningful, implementers should consider the well-being of participants as a key component in the planning and implementation of these projects to ensure their success.

Conclusion

Implementers of professional development programs need to take a dynamic approach to understanding the individuals who go through them. To achieve the aims of these programs, one of the most important things implementers need to accomplish is to understand the people being asked to make these changes. They are people with lives beyond these programs, and their lives impact how they engage with them.

Equally important is the quality of those opportunities and the individuals who enact them. Participants need to feel these programs are worthwhile and that they receive the support and guidance required to succeed. However, support and guidance can only be useful if those who provide them are aware of the unique needs of those to whom it is being given. The well-being of teachers and how they feel about these programs are considerations to be taken into account. Moving beyond the content, timeline, and implementation plan of professional development opportunities require placing the individuals asked to participate within that mix. The well-being of these individuals remains an essential component in determining whether they embrace or resist these opportunities.

Professional development programs, after all, are meant to be constructive and assist teachers in building their knowledge and skills. Those tasked with aiding teachers through these initiatives need to consider the well-being of the participants. When they do so, they are better positioned to guide teachers on a path that allows them to attain their maximum potential as educators and feel more fulfilled in their work.

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