
Professional Development

Love Your Part-time Teachers: Five Supportive Steps Full-time Faculty Could Take

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Even though part-time teachers form the foundation of many university-level language programs in Japan, they receive very little support from their institution and full-time colleagues. Such working conditions can leave teachers feeling isolated or demotivated, and it can have an adverse impact upon the classes they teach. Aiming to encourage greater support for part-time teachers, this paper presents five steps that full-time faculty can take to support their part-time colleagues.

日本における大学レベルの言語教育は多くの場合非常勤講師によって支えられているが、彼等が大学や周囲の専任教員から得られるサポートは非常に限られたものとなっている。こうした職務環境の中で非常勤講師が抱く疎外感や指導意欲の低下は、授業への悪影響にも繋がりがかねない。本稿では、同僚としての立場から非常勤講師により良いサポートを提供するために、専任教員ができる5つの取り組みを紹介する。

At the end of the last academic year, one of my professional peers was reflecting in a Facebook post on his departure from a part-time university position he had held for over ten years, and he voiced his overall disappointment with how part-time faculty are treated at Japanese universities. His message to teachers in tenured/leadership positions was, “Be sure to say goodbye to your part-time colleagues, as it is through their efforts that the pyramid remains standing”.

It is likely true that part-time teachers form the bedrock of most university-level English programs in Japan (Helgesen, 2009; Nagatomo, 2012). In fact, more than half of college staff, teachers and researchers in Japan are employed on

short-term contracts (“Employers move to terminate”, 2013). In the university English program where I am employed full-time, 64% or 73 out of the 114 weekly classes are taught by part-timers. Sadly, all part-time teachers are hired on annual contracts, receive no social welfare benefits and have no job security. Such an employment situation has been criticized for creating a demotivating work situation (Helgesen, 2009), dissatisfied instructors (Harshbarger, 2012) and a “conveyor-belt mentality” (Rivers, 2013, p.77). Altbach (1998) also argued that this type of work situation creates a body of exploited teachers who show very little loyalty to their institution. Furthermore, the plight of language teachers at Japanese universities does not seem to be improving, given the growing trends of outsourcing English language classes (Mulvey, 2012), and the growth of contract full-time university positions (Hayes, 2013).

Regrettably, at many institutions’ part-timers receive little support from their full-time colleagues. I have worked part-time in programs where the only time I met the full-time faculty was at my job interview, and the only other correspondence thereafter was an email to confirm my services for the upcoming academic year. I would go to the university, teach, go home and get paid. While some teachers are very busy and prefer to be left alone, I suspect most are seeking a much warmer collegiate environment. When writing about social inclusion for teachers’ abroad, Falout (2013) noted that human beings are hardwired for seeking companionship and enduring mutual care of others. When individuals feel socially excluded, it can severely impair their cognitive and self-regulation skills. Such a situation ought to be a concern for leaders of language programs, as they can have a very negative influence on teachers’ job satisfaction, and more importantly, the work they do in the classroom.

Reflecting on how Japanese university part-time language teachers’ employment stands in relation to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Helgesen (2009) posited that only teacher’s physiological needs are being cared for, i.e., teachers are paid a salary that affords food and accommodation. Helgesen questioned whether part-time teachers could feel part of a team (love/belonging needs) if they never see their full-time colleagues. He also highlighted that if a teacher feels they are being appropriately cared for, there is a good chance these

feelings would be reciprocated towards their students.

In response to my peer's aforementioned Facebook post, Helgesen (2009) suggested some ways in which full-time teachers could support their part-time colleagues. Following his call for additional ideas, this paper shares five further steps that full-time faculty and/or program leaders could take to this end.

1. Establish an in-house publication

For any teacher at the university level, publications are essential for career development. Also, teachers hunting university work in Japan need to be aware of the hiring criteria of publishing in the internal university publication or *kiyo* (Hayes, 2013). Even though most Japanese universities have an in-house bulletin or journal, in many cases, only full-time faculty members are allowed to submit articles. In slightly more accommodating institutions, part-time teachers have to pay to publish, or they are only permitted to submit articles co-authored with full-time faculty. While Falout (2013) and Trowler & Knight (1999) give detailed descriptions of how mentoring through co-authorship can benefit teachers' development, if universities are already demanding that part-time teachers have a master's degree and academic publications, wouldn't these conditions indicate that the part-time teacher is fit to conduct independent research? It seems therefore that full-time faculty should campaign to allow part-time teachers to be able to submit single-authored papers to their university's journal. Moreover, if your department does not have a publication, work to establish one, or as our language center did, collaborate with an existing journal to edit a special issue containing articles from our teachers. Working in the trenches, part-time teachers have a wealth of experience, and they often bring a unique perspective based on their diverse backgrounds and experience working at multiple institutions. Having an in-house publication creates a platform for part-time teachers to share their work and enhances their career development. Likewise, by supporting teachers' professional development, you can promote teachers' commitment to your program and the quality of their classes (Cote, Milliner, McBride, Imai, & Ogane, 2014).

2. Eat lunch in the part-time teachers' lounge

It is often during casual conversations in the hallway, or print room or elsewhere that great teaching ideas are shared. In a large-scale review of technology integration in the classroom by K-12 American schoolteachers, Reborá (2016) noted that informal communication between teachers was more influential for those implementing new technologies in their classroom than formal faculty development sessions with outside experts. In a separate study on faculty training, Yang (2009) suggested that informal teacher conversations and discussions played a crucial role in the teacher orientation process.

Reflecting on these points, there seems to be a lack of collegiate connection with part-time teachers in my current position. While I feel very connected with my full-time peers, we work in a gated community behind a security door and one floor away from where part-time teachers gather. Having an uninterrupted space to work is wonderful, but the only time I talk to part-time teachers is at formal faculty events and if they are using a classroom neighboring mine.

Eating lunch with the part-time staff would be one way to reduce this distance. It provides an opportunity for new ideas to be exchanged, and it shows that full-timers are willing to make an effort to listen to part-time faculty. Moreover, this simple action addresses teachers' need for social inclusion.

3. Share your research resources

Full-time staff with access to funding and research resources such as video cameras, recording equipment, and data analysis software should be prepared to share these privileges with part-time colleagues. One example could be offering to run data analyses on behalf of part-time teachers using your institution's SPSS license, though be sure to check the specific terms of the license agreement with your institution to ensure that this is permissible. In my institution I collected survey data on behalf of part-time teachers through SurveyMonkey, and part-time teachers can request access to department-wide survey data. Library access may also be restricted for part-time teachers. Full-time staff could also borrow books or request journals on behalf of their part-time colleagues, or simply be willing to show part-time colleagues how to access the school's database. Full-

time teachers could also pool a small fraction of their research budgets to pay for inter-library loans and copying of articles not held in the library's collection but which are needed by part-timers for their research. For a minimal expense, this could have a significant affective impact on part-time teachers.

4. Give part-time teachers a voice

I have touched on this point earlier, but it needs to be stressed that a language program stands to benefit when part-time teachers are given a voice. To this end, part-time teachers could be surveyed each semester to seek feedback about the curriculum or classes. They could even be given opportunities to lead parts of the program. Personal experience indicates that (a) many part-time teachers are interested in such roles as they can add them to their resume and (b) many like the opportunity to work in a leadership role even if it is unpaid. My institution has had no trouble finding volunteers from our pool of part-time teachers to fill these roles. One example of this would be to ask experienced part-timers to orient new part-timers to the program and university (Brown, 1995) or to appoint suitably knowledgeable part-timers to provide electronic learning support.

5. Host workshops and faculty development sessions

Without a research budget, it can be tough for part-time staff to attend conferences or other professional events, particularly if they are living in rural Japan. Therefore full-time faculty should consider establishing a faculty development event. Full-time or part-time teachers could lead these sessions, or universities could connect with local Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) or Japan Association of College English Teachers (JACET) chapters to host events. My school has hosted a variety of events like this. They spread knowledge, connect teachers and researchers and give part-timers the opportunity to share their teaching ideas and research in a professional context. Another alternative is the in-house workshop. If your institution has an in-house workshop, ask your part-timers which areas they would be interested in offering their critically informed perspective on to help develop. As part-timers have a view that is critically informed, this will lead

to development in areas that full-timers may not have been aware of.

Conclusion

While there are many other excellent steps full-time teachers can take to support their part-time colleagues, these five suggestions are a good start: support in-house publishing; eat together; share research resources; give part-time teachers a voice and host professional development sessions.

Not only do these steps help to promote part-time teachers' professional development, they also develop your leadership and people skills while simultaneously addressing core human needs for community and mutual support.

To part-time teachers, you are the engine of many university's foreign language programs, and you deserve better treatment. In closing, I would echo the sentiment of my aforementioned Facebook friend that part-time teachers also need to work to create their own community to support each other. In spite of the precarious employment situations facing many university-level language teachers, by helping each other, we can all grow and work towards our most important goal, serving our students.

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