Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics, Vol 22, June 2022, pp. 500-527
DOI: 10.15738/kjell.22..202206.500

KOREAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS

ISSN: 1598-1398 / e-ISSN 2586-7474

http://journal.kasell.or.kr

Characteristics and Substantial Outcomes of "Snowball": A Long-Term English Teacher Professional Development Program in Seoul

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Received: April 25, 2022
Revised: June 10, 2022
Accepted: June 30, 2022

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ABSTRACT

Ahn, S.-H. Gyemyong, Eun-kyoung Jang and Mun Woo Lee. 2022. Characteristics and substantial outcomes of "Snowball": A long-term English teacher professional development program in Seoul. *Korean Journal of English Language and Linguistics* 22, 500-527.

English language teacher education programs have been offered for in-service teachers producing rather successful results when evaluated immediately after the periods of their implementation. Their long-term results are, however, rarely tapped upon and academically reported. The purpose of this paper is to investigate long-lasting effects of a one-year-long such program, called "Snowball", that was developed in 2015 and ever since implemented by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. To fulfill the purpose, the researchers recruited 12 Snowball graduates to understand how they characterize the program and what changes they have experienced back in their school life. A qualitative analysis of their in-depth interviews has shown that Snowball is characterized by its participants learning in special-interest groups, through action research, and with many sources of inspiration. It also showed that the Snowball graduates spread a culture of sharing, changed their pedagogical values and practices, and also multiply caused changes in social positioning. From these results, the researchers have concluded that Snowball has been a tremendous success with long-lasting impacts.

KEYWORDS

English teacher education program, Snowball, teacher competencies, special-interest group, action research, core values, culture of sharing, learner-centered English education, teacher identity

1. Introduction

The concept of teacher competence has extended significantly when Freeman (1989) proposed a four-constituent model involving teacher *knowledge, skills, attitude,* and *awareness*. The scope of these components has then been extended to involve not only the content area but also learner, teaching self, teaching practice, and social context (Bartlett 1990, Freeman 1989, Freeman and Johnson 1998, Kumaravadivelu 2012, Tarone and Allwight 2005, among others).

Along with this conceptual expansion, international research in language teacher education (LTE) has distinguished the teacher educator's strategies of *training* and *development* (Freeman 1989), identified at least four (*craft, applied science, reflective,* and *experiential*) knowledge source-based models (Deirich and Stunnel 2014, Wallace 1991), along with their variants (Bartlett 1990, Gebhard et al. 1990) and the three (*gestalt, schema,* and *theory*) result-based levels of teacher learning (Korthagen 2010, Korthagen and Lagerwerf 2001). Such different LTE models have partnered different notions of supervision: *directive, alternative, collaborative, nondirective, creative,* and *self-help/explorative* (Gebhard 1990). These different models must have asked for different roles of supervisors: *instructor, manager, counsellor, observer, feedbacker, assessor* and/or *process leader* (Roberts 1998).

At the turn of the millennium, language education theory and practice has seen the clear emergence of constructivism in learning, its sociality and situatedness, the importance of reflection in teaching practice, and the heightened professionality of teaching (Crandall 2000, Guskey 2002, Lave and Wenger 1991, Na et al. 2010, Vygotsky 1978, Wenger 1998). This must be related to this era's information explosion, fast technological development, and the unpredictable direction and pace of changes due to globalization. To cope well with all these facets of the current era, teachers will desperately need not only the ability to learn new knowledge on their own, but also the ability to participate in the production of such knowledge. In a sense, teachers are to continue to learn and grow as lifelong learners.

Domestically in the Republic of Korea (hereafter Korea), on the other hand, English oral skills have been foregrounded for teaching English through English, so for some time intensive English teacher training programs (IETTPs) were emphatically implemented and their mixed results were evaluated (I.-G. Jeong 2014, C. K. Min 2006, W.-h. Kim 2009). Later from 2015, LTE programs began to emphasize competency, assessment for/as learning, backward design of classes, etc. A major recognition in such LTE research was that program contents did not lead to English class improvement (Jung and Chang 2009, B. E. Park 2006, Y.-o. Kim et al. 2008). Further LTE research (Chang 2007, J. Y. Kim et al. 2015) also pointed out crucial features of good LTE programs for currently required teacher competencies, and in fact teacher educators implemented quite satisfactory programs such as the Cambridge ESOL ICELT (e.g., H. Lee 2010) and the so-called "Snowball" program.

Snowball was developed in 2015 to satisfy most requirements on LTE (see Section 2.4) and ever since implemented until 2020 except for 2017 by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. Its focus was mainly laid on checking whether program contents were implemented in actual pedagogical practices, and on encouraging lasting teacher solidarity to improve teaching and learning. Extraordinarily, the program lasted one full academic year to help in-service English teachers develop 'class expertise' in a multifaceted manner. Its format has also been exported over to other subject areas and to programs in other regions.

These long-term LTE programs were reported to have garnered various positive results, but a critical problem has been that few of them were studied to fathom their lasting outcomes. This is a serious gap in academic studies of LTE programs in view of the current demands for teachers to continue life-long learning.

This study has been designed to contribute to fill in this deficiency in our understanding of LTE programs. It has selected Snowball as the object of study. To evaluate the program via its long-term outcomes, we have set up

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the following two research questions:

1) How do Snowball participants retrospectively characterize the programs they participated in?
2) What changes have Snowball participants experienced in their school life?

The first question is to assess the participants' persistent impressions of the program, which can implicitly exert influences on their current pedagogical life. The second question is to estimate Snowball's explicit influences that the participants can become conscious of.

To answer these research questions, this study has recruited and conducted in-depth interviews with 12 former Snowball participants to collect qualitative data. It then conducted a thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. The outcomes from this study will not only benefit LTE program developers and policy makers but also teachers who want to improve their expertise with which to win through the tough front-line of secondary English education.

2. Language Teacher Education Programs

2.1 Language Teaching and Teacher Competencies

As mentioned in Section 1, Freeman (1989) has characterized (language) teaching as "a process of decision-making based on four constituents: knowledge, skills, attitude, and awareness" (p. 31). According to him a language teacher has *knowledge* of the subject matter, the students, and the multi-leveled contexts; (s)he has *skills* for presentation, instruction, error correction, class management, etc.; (s)he has an *attitude* or stance toward oneself, teaching, and the learners; further, (s)he has *awareness,* or "the capacity to recognize and monitor the attention [(s)he] is giving or has given to [things]" (p. 33), relevant to his/her knowledge, skills, and attitude.

Enlarging the scope of the fourth constituent of awareness, a *critical reflective* model of teaching was envisioned, e.g., in Bartlett (1990) as involving critical reflective teaching going through five phases of questioning: (i) "What do I do as a teacher?" [*mapping*]; (ii) "What is the meaning of my teaching?", "What did I intend?" [*informing*]; (iii) "How did I come to be this way?", "How was it possible for my present view of teaching (with reasons) to have emerged?" [*contesting*]; (iv) "How might I teach differently?" [*appraising*]; and (iv) "What and how shall I now teach?" [*acting*] (pp. 209-213). Here, reflective teaching is not only an individual psychological process, but also a critical thinking and action in view of social and historical contexts.

In about a decade later, Freeman and Johnson (1998) explored more thoroughly the knowledge-base of LTE as involving three domains: The domain of *teacher as learner* involves the teacher's prior knowledge and beliefs, the developmental trajectory of his or her teaching knowledge, the contextual influences on teacher learning, and ways of intervention in teacher learning; the domain of *social context*, mainly *schools* as physical and sociocultural settings and *schooling* as the sociocultural and historical processes; and the domain of *pedagogical process*, the *grounded* knowledge based on classroom practices and *a priori* knowledge from their disciplinary antecedents, both of which should be obtained from a social constructivist, as well as individual, perspective and be engaging teachers and learners as protagonists in classroom practices. To these three, Tarone and Allwright (2005) add the *learner* as a fourth domain. In these four domains, obviously, teachers will need competencies.

Kumaravadivelu (2012) takes globalization into serious consideration. He proposes a modular approach to what teachers should be able to do. His model emphasizes teachers' capabilities to construct "professional, procedural, and personal *knowledge* base", "analyze *learner* needs, motivation, and autonomy", "recognize their own identities,

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beliefs and values", "perform teaching, theorizing and dialogizing" and "monitor their own teaching acts" (p. 17). He finesses the domain of social context by melting its importance into the three operating principles of *particularity, practicality,* and *possibility*, which anchor teacher awareness, practices, and agency to actual situational contexts.

The ideas reviewed thus far (Bartlett 1990, Freeman 1989, Freeman and Johnson 1998, Kumaravadivelu 2012, Tarone and Allwight 2005) tend to elucidate different but complementary facets of teacher competencies. As a way of their integration, we will basically adopt the three competence ingredients of knowledge, attitudes, and skills and elaborate them by major pedagogical domains as in Table 1 (Ahn 2016); attention to and critical reflection on them will be triggered and monitored by awareness (Bartlett 1990, Freeman 1989), so the model will assimilate into a trigonal pyramid with awareness at the top, connected to the three constituents in different domains.

Table 1. Teacher Competencies in Teaching Domains

	Knowledge	**Attitudes**	**Skills**
Content Areas	English language(s) & "English" cultures	Functional & critical cultural diversity & relativity	Proficient in English language & culture(s)
Students as Learners	Learner needs, motivation & autonomy	Respect for human rights, democracy & individual diversity	Analyzing & satisfying learner needs, etc.
Teachers as Learners	Teacher identities, beliefs, values	Transformative & moral; no native speakerism, etc.	Self-constructing, moral agency; autoethnography
Teaching Practices	English teaching methods & methodology	Reflective, transformative; global culture constructing	Teaching skills; critical pedagogy; action research
Social Contexts	Ideologies in schools & schooling	Democratic, individual agency; participation in curriculum building	Dialogizing w/ peers, admin. managers

This model of teacher competence will be comprehensive enough involving content areas, language learners, teacher-learners, teaching practices, and social contexts all the others are concerned with.

2.2 Language Teacher Education

Freeman (1989) characterizes LTE as at least involving the teacher and the teacher educator (or collaborator), and as the process of the collaborator purporting to bring forth change in the teaching process. The collaborator generally uses two types of strategy: *training,* i.e., direct intervention on specific facets of teaching mainly in the teacher's knowledge and skills; and/or *development*, i.e., "influence and indirect intervention that works on complex, integrated aspects of teaching; these aspects are idiosyncratic and individual" (p. 40) and of the teacher's attitude and awareness.

Addable to this characterization is Wallace's (1991) identification of three major contemporary models of LTE based on the sources of the professional knowledge of teaching: The knowledge may be regarded as coming from practitioners' experience [the *craft* model], or from scientific theorization [the *applied science* model], or from both [the *reflective* model]. While malignant forms of the first two models may tilt toward the strategy of training, the third seems to incorporate both training and development strategies in a more balanced way incorporating awareness-based *reflective cycles* connecting practice and reflection as an important component.

With an extension of scope of reflection, the reflective model will naturally be extended to a critical reflective model (Bartlett 1990). Another variant of the reflective model is found in Gebhard et al.'s (1990) *multiple-activities*

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approach, which emphasizes the strategy of development via conducting investigative projects. This approach involves the stages of (i) “teaching a class” (p. 17), (ii) “observing the teaching act” (p. 19), and (iii) “conducting investigative projects of teaching” (p. 21).

Such different types of LTE have evolved different models of supervision (Gebhard 1990). In *directive* supervision, the supervisor (or collaborator in Freeman’s (1989) terms) functions “to direct and inform the teacher, model teaching behaviors, and evaluate the teacher’s master of defined behaviors” (p. 156); in *alternative* supervision, to “suggest a variety of alternatives to what the teacher has done in the classroom” (p. 158); in *collaborative* supervision, to “work with teachers but not direct them” (p. 159); in *nondirective* supervision, “to have [the teacher] come up with [his/her] own solutions to teaching problems.” (p. 160); in *creative* supervision, to shift “supervisory responsibilities from the supervisor to other sources” such as “teaching centers” and peers (p. 162); and lastly in *self-help/explorative* supervision, along with teachers to “gain awareness of their teaching through observation and exploration” (p. 163). In these different models, the supervisor will present, question, solve problems, guide discussion (as an *instructor*); plan, liaise, organize (*manager*); relate, respond, help, handle difficulties (*counsellor*); establish frames of reference, focus/observe/record instruction, analyze observations (*observer*); stimulate recall of the lesson/incidents, analyze performance, share interpretations, plan forward (*feedbacker*); communicate with learner-teachers, obtain/assess evidence, reach summative assessments (*assessor*); guide the processes of groups (*process leader*) (Roberts 1998, Table 1.1).

As the millennium changes, at least four transitions in LTE have become evident (Crandall, 2000). First, teacher learners have become regarded as a major source of teaching knowledge composition, so teacher recognition, reflection, exploration, and research are being highlighted. Second, teacher education has become more focused on teacher awareness and practice in real-world situations, and on connections based on specific relationships among participants and between theory and practice (Johnson 2009, Johnson and Golombek 2011, Lave and Wenger 1991). “For true concepts to emerge, teachers must have multiple and sustained opportunities for dialogic mediation, scaffolded learning, and assisted performance as they participate in and learn about relevant aspects of their professional worlds” (Johnson 2009: 4-5). Third, teachers’ prior undesirable learning experience has been recognized as needing unlearning through self-observation and reflection on their actual teaching practices, so that they may re-establish their educational philosophy and pedagogical practices that suit their new understanding of language teaching and learning. As the class situation becomes more complicated, fourth and lastly, more teachers have come to believe that they should not only develop their own educational theories but also set the direction of their professional development through cooperative observation, teacher research and exploration (Kumaravadivelu 2012). Such overall learner-centeredness has given a thought to the heterogeneity of teacher learner groups (Tarone and Allwright 2005) whose different needs LTE programs should satisfy with different emphases and in different lengths of period.

In view of those changing needs, it is understandable why Deirich and Stunnel (2014) come to recognize not only Wallace’s (1991) three LTE models, the craft(work) model, the applied science/teacher model, and the reflective (practitioner) model, but also the *experiential model*, which adds up research modules: This most recent model views teachers as researchers widely seeking theoretical information, making academic observations to analyze, trying to fully understand and improve pedagogical processes and immediate situations (Kumaravadivelu 2012). The first two models tend to view knowledge as transmissible and education as training. In contrast, the last two models emphasize the aspect of knowledge as collaboratively constructed and education as development.

These LTE models can be related to deepening processes of teacher learning as elaborated in the gestalt-schema-theory model (Korthagen 2010, Korthagen and Lagerwerf 2001); Initially, the teacher shows a response in the classroom on the basis of a gestalt, “the whole of [his or her] perception of the here-and-now situation, i.e. both

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his or her sensory perception of the environment as well as the images, thoughts, feelings, needs, values, and behavioral tendencies elicited by the situation" (Korthagen 2010, p. 101). When the teacher reflects on a situation and the actions (s)he took in it, (s)he may enter the schema level of learning, coming up with a schema, which is "a conscious network of concepts, characteristics, principles, and so on, helpful in describing practice" (p. 102). If the teacher wants to understand pedagogical situations more accurately, broadly, consistently, simply and fruitfully, (s)he arrives at the theory level to construct "a logical ordering … in the knowledge formed before" (p. 102). The schema level and the theory level will correlate respectively with Deirich and Stunnel's (2014) reflective practitioner model and the experiential model.

2.3 Domestic Situations of Language Teacher Education

As in most English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, English teachers in Korea have been expected to have one more competency: abilities to teach English through English. From 2003 on the then Korean government promoted improvement of English teachers' English skills as well as teaching skills. This governmental drive generated many IETTPs and studies on their planning, implementation, and evaluation (Jeong 2014, S.-Y. Kim et al. 2010, W.-h. Kim 2009, C. K. Min 2006 among others). Regarding these results, Jung and Chang (2009) have made reservations pointing out that participants tend to respond positively when their motivations are heightened immediately after finishing LTE programs, and therefore suggesting that LTE outcomes be assessed with regard to actual changes in classes, whose studies are seriously deficient in Korea. They also noted that it is school-based English LTE programs that have a higher potentiality to bring forth a *sense of plausibility* (Prabhu 1987) and actual class changes.

Such an incongruence between LTE contents and class implementation has been a chronic problem revealed in LTE research. B. E. Park (2006), for example, surveyed 253 primary-school English teachers who were either participating in or had finished an LTE program provided in a southern province. She found out that participants' motivation and English fluency mediate positive outcomes in actual class improvement and suggested that program success requires selecting participants with high motivation and enough language fluency. Y.-o. Kim et al. (2008), on the other hand, surveyed 484 secondary-school English teachers who finished their 1st-level English teacher qualification training programs and found out that the program contents were too theoretical to be applicable in class teaching.

Aligning with such megatrends as noticed internationally (Sections 2.1-2.2) and like those domestic demands for LTE outcomes in actual class improvement, teacher education researchers in Korea have proposed more up-to-date longer-term LTE models for improving teacher competencies. K. Chang (2007), among others, proposed that the focus of LTE program should be shifted from unidirectional knowledge transfer to increasing the professionalism of individual teachers, such as teacher competency development, critical reflection, and teacher learning by doing. In short, she embraced teacher participants as "subjects" of professional knowledge.

The Cambridge ESOL ICELT (In-service Certificate in English Language Training) was a six-month program that moved *pari passu* with such demands; it targeted improvement in participants' English skills and pedagogical competencies, but it turned out to emphasize the second sector reflecting their realistic needs (H. Lee 2010). This program selected only ten participants and closely connected the program contents and the participants' in-class applications to their high level of satisfaction.

In 2015, the Korean government revised the National Curriculum for Secondary Education reflecting recent research results to emphasize competence, process-centric assessment, and backward course design. Reviewing existing online English LTE programs, in a similar vein, J. Y. Kim et al. (2015) have pointed out problems such as

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top-down approaches, unsustainability of teacher education, disconnection with field practice, insufficient establishment of community of practice, and lack of opportunities for growth in teaching practice. In this respect, they recommended as key elements of effective remote LTE, among others, bottom-up access to curriculum development, establishment of a community of practice (DuFour 2004, Hord 2008) for teacher education sustainability, and reflective teacher learning to link teacher education to field practice. By organizing customized content according to the needs of participants, first, the program should become more relevant and meaningful to teacher learners. For the effect of LTE to continue, second, they need to be interconnected through a community of practice. This is because "thoughts centered on the site at a personal level must be supplemented and spread through social support such as teacher groups" (p. 252). Inter-teacher cooperation also helps teachers to self-identify and operate curriculum (Y. M. Kim and Cheong 2012). Third, participants should reflectively learn how to connect program contents with actual class teaching.[1]

2.4 The Snowball Program

Around the same time, the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education developed a genuinely new type of 60-hour advanced English LTE program and since 2015 implemented it under the leadership of Master Teacher (M.T.) Eun-kyoung Jang, one of the authors of this article. The program *Jungdeung Yeongeo Sueop Jeonmunga Dwegi* ('Becoming an Expert in Secondary English Classes') was designed to help participants to develop teaching competencies (K. Chang 2007, Freeman 1989, Kumaravadivelu 2012, Table 1). Concretely, it was intended to solve the chronic discrepancy between program contents and class implementation (Y.-o. Kim et al. 2008, B. E. Park 2006); it positioned teacher participants as subjects of professional knowledge construction (K. Chang 2007) satisfying the pending demands for bottom-up access to curriculum development, establishment of a professional learning community, and linking theoretical knowledge to field practice through reflective teaching (J. Y. Kim et al. 2015). Its ultimate purpose was to uprear experts in English classes and assessment to potentially serve as teacher trainers/educators.

In the first year, it began by having ten 3-hour monthly sessions, whose duration and frequency were adjusted in later years to reasonable flows of the Program and to other practical considerations. Every year, the Program began by asking, "What troubles you in your class?" Based on their common needs, participants were divided into special interest groups (SIGs). Different SIGs devoted the first half of the year to autonomously learning about their selected pedagogical themes; they studied books and articles by groups and shared their learnings with other groups. In the second half, then, the SIGs each did action research to develop and implement a common lesson plan; in monthly sessions, each SIG representative presented what his/her SIG achieved in designing the common lesson plan, which was critiqued or complemented in detail by the supervisor and the participants in other SIGs. When SIG representatives put their common lesson plans finally into practice in their own classrooms, their *real* classes were opened not only to other Snowball participants but also to any teachers in the Seoul area. At the end

[1] Similar studies have been done for general teacher education programs: J.-M. Gu 2014), for example, has implemented an 8-week program based on cognitive apprentice theory and found out that it was effective for trainable constituents but not for the teaching competencies to be developed. J.-J. Kang (2017) developed a professional development program for global citizenship education meeting most of current requirements, so that it could not only provide cognitive teacher learning experiences, but also teachers' needs for non-cognitive learning experiences including motivation and emotional stability, and he reported positive program results. This proved the possibility that field linkage, experience-based learning, cooperation, learning community, teacher self-directedness, and social constructivism and scaffolding could be realized fruitfully in a long-term general teacher education program in Korea.

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of the Program, all the SIGs shared their results in a showcase called Class Concert with about 200 in- and pre-service teachers, who had applied for participation.

This so-called "Snowball" program recruited only a small number of participants, around 20 in number. Its core values included (A) teacher expertise in class/evaluation, (B) collective intelligence and comradeship, (C) reflection and practice, and (D) contribution and commitment. This research-based program asked participants to identify most urgent problems in their current English language classes, explore and find out the best solutions for themselves to share among themselves, design and implement actual classes, experience the processes of deep thinking and laborious improvements. Snowball was planned and practiced independently of, but was quite similar to, J. J. Kang's (2017) teacher education program (See Note 1). Both involved a teaching project of designing and implementing an actual class or pedagogical program; both demanded a high level of peer collaboration in terms of brainstorming, information exchange, and healthy critical feedback and emotional support. Snowball, however, was more participant-empowering in that it asked the participants to sort out problems, group-study relevant theories, and develop and undertake group projects of designing and improving actual classes. It facilitated more actively participants' continuous inter-connections via social network service communities and/or through professional learning communities to boost up field applicability. This was supported by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education's policy of financial support for cross-school teacher learning communities and the general recommendation to in-service teachers for at least 45 hours' yearly participation in education programs.

Jang (2018) has, for instance, stated that the 2018 Snowball was designed as a program for "field-based development with continuity, practice, feedback and growth", in which participants "build their own theoretical framework, practice learning, and gain the power to continue their hard journey alone" (p. i). H. R. Lee (2018), the collection of participant groups' self-reports, vividly conveys the participants' *explosive* responses. They described the program, for instance, as "an oasis in a dry desert" (Ju Hye Kim, p. 70), providing "a ray of light" (Ji Hye Sohn, p. 121), like "a Christian baptism" (Hanna Chung, p. 122), as "a training that has given me strength to overcome all difficulties" (Yeong Hee Kim, p. 69), and as "a year's journey to regain my identity as a teacher" (Su Hyeong Ju, p. 163). Other participants said they gained useful materials and came to clearly comprehend immediately applicable class activities, but more valuably that they received "constant intellectual stimulation and inspiration" (Sang Eun Kim, p. 122) during the process of planning, discussing, receiving feedback, and conducting actual classes. While experiencing meticulous class design that fully took into account her own students' position, some felt, "I thought my hair was becoming hoary enough, and I wet my pillow a lot" (Hannah Chung, p. 122). As for their colleagues, others said, "It's like gaining strong comrades in today's classroom, which is like a battlefield" (Ju Hye Kim, p. 70).

This program has continued to be popular over the past five years, expanding to other subjects and education offices in other regions. As a long-term effect, moreover, it seems that many training participants maintain a community of learning and practice while continuing their network through social networking after the training ends. However, its long-term effects haven't been assessed systematically.

3. The Study

3.1 Participants

The participants of this study were certified English teachers in South Korea. One of the researchers, who played a key role in designing and administering the Snowball teacher training program for five years (Programs 1–5) as

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a master teacher, posted a recruitment notice for this study in the group chat room of Snowball members. There were 12 voluntary participants: one male teacher and eleven female teachers. They were all from different schools and their average age was 40.5 years. Their teaching experience ranged from 6 years to 21 years, with an average of 13.2 years. The number of participants who took part in each program was as follows: three in Program 1, one in Program 2, five in Program 3, three in Program 4, and two in Program 5.[2] Their motivations for deciding to take part in the Snowball teacher training program were also varied. Most of the participants took part in the program following recommendation of the master teacher, colleagues, teacher trainers, or a British Council Program, but there were some participants who wanted to improve classes and who wanted to prepare for the changing world and students. Table 3.1 shows detailed information for each participant.

Table 2. Profiles of the Participants

Participant	Sex	Age	Teaching experience (years)	Year of the program	Motivation to take part in the program
Teacher 1	M	45	16	Program 4	Wanted to improve classes in his 15th year of career
Teacher 2	F	38	12.5	Program 3	Followed recommendation of the master teacher, who attended her teaching demo at the British Council
Teacher 3	F	38	12	Program 1	Followed recommendation of the master teacher to experience the full autonomous process of long-term action research
Teacher 4	F	38	10	Program 3	Followed recommendation of the master teacher to recover a sense of teaching after her maternity leave and increase teacher expertise.
Teacher 5	F	39	6	Program 4	Followed recommendation of a colleague at the same school to renovate current classes and increase teacher expertise
Teacher 6	F	43	21	Program 2	Followed recommendation of a British Council program colleague because of its orientation to teaching and open classes
Teacher 7	F	41	7	Program 3	Followed recommendation of the master teacher after having a conversation about her teaching demo; applied for the program with a colleague
Teacher 8	F	40	15	Program 3	Voluntarily applied for the program to be prepared for the changing world and students
Teacher 9	F	37	9	Programs 4 & 5	Followed recommendation of a colleague who praised group activities and resourcefulness of the Snowball program
Teacher 10	F	42	19	Program 1	Followed recommendation of the master teacher to increase teacher expertise
Teacher 11	F	40	10	Program 3	Followed recommendation of teacher trainers who emphasized its formation of research communities; participated in the program for professional development in camaraderie
Teacher 12	F	45	21	Programs 1 & 5	Followed recommendation of the master teacher in search for right classes; participated in Programs 2–4 as a mentor.

[2] Two participants took part in the program twice.

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3.2 Data Collection Procedures

Participant interviews were conducted face-to-face, except with two teachers who were interviewed online using Zoom due to tighter COVID-19 restrictions. The participants were initially asked to answer several background questions, including questions on their demographic background and motivation to take part in the Snowball teacher training program. The main part of the interview was composed of five lead-off questions (see Table 3), and the participants were asked further questions depending on their answers. For instance, Question 5 was developed into further questions including but not limited to "What are your own definition of 'good lesson'?" or "In what aspects do you think your teaching expertise has been improved?"

Table 3. Lead-off Interview Questions

1. Which branch were you in and why?
2. What was the most worthwhile aspect of the Snowball teacher training program?
3. What was the most difficult aspect of the Snowball teacher training program?
4. What was the biggest difference between the Snowball teacher training program and other teacher training programs?
5. What changes have you experienced in your schooling practices since participating in the Snowball teacher training program?

The interviews took about 45 minutes on average and were all audio-recorded or Zoom-recorded with the participants' consent. The interviews were conducted in Korean and subsequently transcribed by one researcher with assistants' help. The other two researchers double-checked the transcribed versions and the English-translated excerpts to prevent any inaccuracies or incompleteness.

3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to analyze the collected data (Braun and Clarke 2006, Yang 2020), which is a qualitative research method that groups important phrases and keywords from the data and then extracts categories and major themes from them. In the first stage, the researchers converted the recorded interviews into written transcripts, and then they read and reread the transcripts carefully to come up with in-vivo codes that summarized important phrases and keywords. This stage resulted in 728 in-vivo codes. The next step was to group these in-vivo codes into common categories. Twenty-four categories were extracted: (1) general ideas about special-interest groups (SIGs), (2) self-selection of personally relevant problems, (3) learning together, (4) group dynamics, (5) knowledge absorption, (6) planning and practice, (7) multiple chances for trial and success, (8) thorough checking and confirming, (9) good role models, (10) participant selection, (11) Snowball spirit/philosophy, (12) highly motivated participants, (13) experience of success, (14) partaking in/forming teacher-learning community, (15) Snowball group chat room, (16) lecturing and mentoring, (17) sharing tips and ideas, (18) clarifying class objectives and sharpening focus, (19) long-term planning, (20) student-centered classes, (21) more focus on student growth, (22) positioning self, (23) positioning others, and (24) positioning by others.

The next stage was to extract the major themes from these categories. The categories were synthesized and reorganized by grouping the similar ones. There were six themes as follows: (I) customized SIGs (Categories 1–4), (II) participants as action researchers (Categories 5–8), (III) abundant sources of inspiration (Categories 9–13), (IV) a culture of sharing (Categories 14–17), (V) "designing" student-centered classes (Categories 18–21), and (VI) changes in social positioning (Categories 22–24). Finally, the first three themes (Themes I, II, and III) were used to answer the first research question, about the features of the Snowball program, while the remaining three

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themes (Themes IV, V, and VI) were used to address the second research question on Snowball's long-term outcomes.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Features of the Snowball Teacher Training Program

4.1.1 Customized SIGs

Snowball's most distinctive feature was its "customization." Unlike other usual English LTE programs, this program was completely based on the participants' individualized interests, which addressed Tarone and Allwight's (2005) concerns about heterogeneity of teacher needs. At the beginning of each class, the teacher participants had an ice-breaking session during which they introduced themselves and talked about why they had joined the program. They also wrote down their interests, for example, assessment, extensive reading, writing and feedback, flipped learning, project-based learning, and educational technology. Then, the master teacher helped organize them into small groups based on similar interests. These organically emerging small groups were called "special interest groups" (or SIGs). The participants thought highly of the SIGs mainly because these dealt with different timely issues in English education in South Korea and gave them an opportunity to think and study more about those issues, together with their "comrades"-to-be. Teacher 12 was keenly interested in feedbacking, for example, and the Feedback SIG was formed for the first time in Program 5; Teacher 4's interest in assessment led to the formation of the Assessment SIG.

> *I was thinking about how I could give feedback well*. [Omission] But I couldn't go on the first day of the Program. I couldn't go, so *I asked Teacher Cho E. to tell that I have this kind of intention, so* the Feedback SIG *was born somehow*. (Teacher 12)

> Well … *I was aware that the importance of assessment was getting more intense in the field.* When I worked at C High School, I thought it would not be easy to ultimately change English classes if we kept asking questions about grammar and minor things in the tests. No matter how hard we tried to implement activity-based learning or communication-based teaching, it did not seem to change. So … *I wanted to think more deeply about how we could actually change English classes and assessment, especially with other teachers.* (Teacher 4)

Inside each SIG, the teachers chose personally relevant problems to solve as their common project topics; this personal relevance must have increased participant motivation significantly (Chapman and Vagle 2015, Keller 2009). As the participants began the program with their own project topics, they had the agency to choose what they wanted to delve into more and what directions they wanted to take to enhance their efficacy as teachers.

Constructing solutions to their common problems and undertaking their group projects, further, they had to work as a "learning community" (DuFour 2004, Hord 2008) and supported one another. The long-period participation enabled "accumulation of dialogs", which formed "trust" among SIG members, which in turn facilitated "self-disclosure" and "authentic engagement" (Teacher 9). That is, *group cohesiveness* must have constituted a secure foundation for "multiple and sustained opportunities for dialogic mediation, scaffolded learning, and sustained

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performance" (Johnson 2009, pp. 4-5). Consequently, the teachers who participated in this learning community openly shared common interests, concerns, and possible solutions, which enabled them to have synergic group dynamics to exchange authentic healthy feedback and build one another up.

> We think about something in an in-depth way and try to find solutions together. *The team members share their opinions freely*, such as, "Let's try this method this time, let's try another thing, or you need to do that, something like that." *They give these practical pieces of advice based on mutual understanding and empathy*, and this can be done only in this Snowball program. You know, we spend so much time together, not just in the Program but out of the Program. (Teacher 5)

> *First of all, I think the best thing about this program was that we worked as a team so that the members could help one another, and we had comrades who encouraged one another*. I think this really helped a lot. So I think this program means encouragement, yes, encouragement. (Teacher 3)

Both Teacher 5 and Teacher 3 emphasized that they enjoyed working in a "team" with peer teachers during the Program. Furthermore, their gatherings were different from those of typical LTE programs, which usually stress formal aspects such as the required time spent on the program itself. Snowball helped the participants establish "invisible bonds" based on "mutual understanding and empathy" so that they had "comrades who encouraged one another." These substantial group dynamics were built because Snowball was grounded in customized SIGs on a long-term basis.

This result shows that Snowball satisfied J. Y. Kim et al.'s (2015) demands for a bottom-up approach to English LTE program increasing the program contents' relevance to classroom practices and their meaningfulness to participants, and for its facilitation of teacher inter-connection via group dynamics in communities of learning (Wenger 1998). The participants must have improved their competencies for teachers as learners in Table 1. Its design and implementation will surely be evaluated as supporting the sociocultural perspective of teaching/learning as "dialogic mediation" (Johnson 2009), and if ever will find its success factors such as *social identification/facilitation/support, group cohesion,* and amicable *group climate*, in research results of small-group psychology (Borek and Abraham 2018). In their own SIGs, different groups of teacher participants set their own directions of professional development via cooperative observation, teacher research and exploration (Crandall 2000, Kumaravadivelu 2012).

4.1.2 Participants as action researchers

Along with its "customized" characteristics, Snowball involved the participants in the process of action research in a natural way. Action research requires teacher-researchers to participate actively and iteratively in identifying the field-relevant issues, planning and conducting research that involves implementation, and reflecting on the research process and outcomes. Notably, the whole process of action research coincides with that of Snowball, which made the participants become teacher-researchers in the long run. Undertaking different but related action research projects, the participants of each SIG were able to "build and absorb" knowledge about a target topic as a team. As Teacher 9 stated, the team members chose books on relevant theories to read together, divided the chapters among the individual members, took turns to give a presentation about their assigned chapters, and discussed the main points and relevant issues, especially in relation to English education in Korea. In doing so, the team members were able to study the theoretical background of their own topics more deeply in a collaborative way.

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> *It was like, "You take Chapter 1, and you take Chapter 2."* We did it this way, but there were some teachers who read all the chapters in two weeks. *We usually give a presentation once per month, so we finish one book per month*. [Omission.] So, I would say it was a sum of cumulative knowledge. (Teacher 9)

Once they had absorbed the knowledge, they tried to utilize it by linking the knowledge to their teaching practice. This turned them naturally into teacher-researchers who were involved in the process of action research. All the participants interviewed mentioned that they tried to connect "theory and practice" by coming up with individual practical plans and implementing those plans in their own classrooms, reflecting and critiquing the whole process individually and then together in and across SIGs, and finally improving their own teaching. Teacher 5 described how she tried to plan her class after reading the books with other team members and how she put into practice her plans from the perspective of action research.

> When we are involved in Snowball, we think more deeply about our relationship with our students, how we have to deal with and endure unexpected results after we apply the theory, and how to lead our students more efficiently. [Omission.] *I tried hard to apply the theories I studied with other teachers, especially using rubrics or giving feedback to my students. I used to study such things while reading books with other teachers. We used to say like, "Oh, I should try this," and then we actually tried to put them into practice as much as possible.* (Teacher 5)

The theories that Participant 5 examined in the SIG could become "live" theories because the participants tried to utilize and apply them in relation to their own teaching practices. They thought about their students and their classrooms and about how to assess them in the process of planning, implementation, reflection, and critiquing.

Referring to this process as "action research", Teacher 3 specifically pointed out its crucial advantage in combination of the one-year length and the SIG cohesiveness.

> The advantage is ... I think that it offers many opportunities. So, I tried a little, but I failed, but I still have time to do it again. … *A year is a little long, so I can try again even if I fail, and I can get up again* even if I want to give up. Because I have my teammates next to me, I'm dragged away (*laughter*). I'll have to try again. I have a chance to stand on my feet like this. That's the advantage. It's about the duration. (Teacher 3)

She highlighted that the longevity of their action research gave the participants ample chances to recover from potential failures with the substantial help from their comrades and to attain eventual successes.

Discussing its difficulty, furthermore, Teachers 5 and 11 attended to its thoroughness in checking and confirming their action research processes.

> I'll *have to squeeze everything out of me. I must reveal my weakness and everything, and prepare myself to be criticized?* Oh, my heart was having a hard time. You have to be ready. I think that's the most important thing. In this training, whether I'm good or not, I just have to reveal everything about me like being bare so that I can wear new clothes. (Teacher 5)

> And *we get confirmation. We keep getting feedback ... There's no end ... We can't help but do it. We can't do it half-heartedly. It's a scary place ... We can't fool others*. This is kind of like being evaluated by a professor. (Teacher 11)

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Teacher 5 was saying that the Snowball participants had to muster and reveal their maximal teaching capabilities and then could grow in their zones of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978) through close and thorough interaction with the supervisor and among participants. Teacher 11 said such a thorough process of checking and confirming made Snowball a "scary" program, which when finished must have constituted steppingstones for further pedagogical reforms and have given the participants courage to pursue them.

It was not important for the participants to be aware of the term "action research" because being unaware of the term did not hinder them from actively working as teacher-researchers through multiple reiterative processes of thinking, discussing, implementing, and reflecting. In addition, every stage was improved, as it was based on continuous critique that helped the participants reflect on and revise what they had done. That process-based characteristic made Snowball distinctive from the typical one-shot, top-down teacher training programs.

The result in this subsection shows that Snowball took Gebhard et al.'s (1990) multiple-activities approach, constituting an instance of the experiential model (Deirich and Stunnel 2014), in which the participants would attain a sense of plausibility (Prabhu 1987) of concepts and/or theories they learned and build up schemas and/or practical theories from their reflective cycles in action research (Korthagen 2010). Ideally this Program engaged teacher participants as "protagonists in classroom practices" (Freeman and Johnson 1998) and boosted up their competencies to "perform teaching, theorizing and dialogizing" satisfying the principles of "particularity", "practicality", and "possibility" (Kumaravadivelu 2012). These benign characteristics were cropped because Snowball had been designed in a sense as a "school-based" program (Jung and Chang 2009) to overcome the chronic problem of the discrepancy between LTE contents and class implementation (Y.-o. Kim et al. 2008, B. E. Park 2006) just like the Cambridge ESOL IELT program (H. Lee 2010) through reflective teacher learning (J. Y. Kim et al. 2015). Snowball participants learned by *doing* and could position themselves as *subjects* of professional knowledge (Chang 2007).

Their *success* in designing and implementing a challenging class through Snowball must have satisfied their psychological needs for autonomy and competence as well as relatedness (Deci and Ryan 2000, Dweck 2017) and heightened their motivation to continuously implement their learning in future courses of teaching (Chapman and Vagle 2015). They must have improved their competencies for *teaching practices* in Table 1.

4.1.3 Abundant sources of inspiration

The final feature of the Snowball program was that it provided the participants with abundant sources of inspiration. The supervisor herself, first, must have been a superb role model and motivator. When asked, "What was your foremost gain from Snowball?", Teachers 1 and 11 answered that "it was that I met M.T. Jang as my best role model." While working with their *highly motivated* peer teachers, most participants also received inspiration a lot from each other. Sometimes they were good role models for others, while at other times, they found good role models in their SIGs. Teacher 12, for example, "whipped herself" due to the supervisor's efforts and peer teachers' "pushing their ways forward"; Teachers 2, 3, 9 and 11 felt keenly their own "shortages" due to peers who worked harder and/or taught brilliantly; Teacher 8 felt a *sense of shame* witnessing a peer accomplished a class she "gave up with too easily"; Teacher 4 was *consoled* and *encouraged* to try again when such outstanding peers shared their experiences of failure and/or expressed their honest feelings of hardships; Teacher 1 felt it *painful* to have nothing to share with his peers; etc.

As described already in Sections 4.1.1-4.1.2, second, the participants also learned a lot together and from each other. The participants, many of whom had not previously been able to observe other teachers' classes or had lacked the opportunity to share ideas with other teachers, became "completely open" to one another and learned things not by memorization but by *realization*. Teacher 5, for instance, stated she found an abundant source of

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inspiration in the books she and her peers studied together and in group members' substantial bits of advice based on understanding and empathy. Significantly, they dealt together with the *entire* processes of their own classes in detail: from their conceptions, major considerations, concerns, etc. to their wrapping-up. This helped Teacher 4, for example, to overcome fears and get courage to venture into designing and implementing her own new type of class. Teachers 4 and 8 were deeply touched and thankful when their SIG members unceasingly had interest in their classes, provided feedback, and agonized on them together with them throughout the entire process of their planning and implementation.

In this way, the participants were inspired by their peers' *togetherness* and *thoroughness*. Teacher 2 described this situation as having experienced a "eureka moment" whenever working in her SIG thanks to her group members who gave her "brilliant" ideas.

> So, when I listened to other teachers' ideas, I had the brilliant idea that I can plan for the lesson in an ideal way if I teach this project class. *That very moment was literally a "eureka moment," and I felt so excited.* I felt so thrilled every time, yes, every time. (Teacher 2)

Participants like her experienced thrill and excitement, which must have chastened them to participate more wholeheartedly.

In Snowball, consequently, Teacher 1 discovered more legitimate criteria of pedagogical practices from those "role models" and their "pedagogical ideas" and discovered the real meaning of being an English teacher.

> I realized, "Wow, there are teachers who do things like this." *So, I would say I've experienced diversity in Snowball. It helped me escape from that strong mannerism that I've gotten in a small-sized private school.* I always think in this way. "What would other Snowball teachers do in this situation? What about our mentor teacher? What would she do in this situation?" I constantly think, "This activity is nonsense to them and this lesson plan will not be accepted by them," something like. (Teacher 1)

Rubbing elbows with such role models, Teacher 1 did break out of his mannerism to adopt their *right ways of teaching* as his own criteria. Similarly, Teacher 6 said, "whenever I talk about leadership, I get reminiscent of M.T. Jang and other Snowball teachers." To her, the supervisor practiced a leadership of thoughtful *coaching* which involved fully *empowering* the teacher learners but never missing important points.

One possible reason why the participants were good role models for one another was that they were selected into participation because of their already high levels of motivation, good attitude, expertise, and experience, which was the third source of inspiration. Having been screened in filled them with "pride". Once the first Snowball program went viral with its challenging but outstanding features, it attracted more applicants from various regions. The participants screened in did not only have pride but also felt a sense of responsibility to become superb, as Teacher 6 related.

> *I think teachers in the Snowball program have pride inside.* [Omission.] *We are selected to be here.* So, we have this feeling inside that we have to be good and responsible for the master teacher who selected us to join the Program. She made this for us, we are indebted to her, so we have to be good and we have to be the top in the nation. *I think we feel like we are the "avengers."* (Teacher 6)

"Pride" in and responsibility from being selected as a Snowball member motivated the participants to even become

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more ready to play the role of "avengers" or *pedagogical missionaries*.

Being selected, the participants also felt confident in what they were or had been doing. Teacher 3's pedagogical pursuit, for example, was confirmed with relief; she felt, "I'm relieved that I'm not going the wrong way. I'm relieved. Oh, what I'm pursuing alone like this is not a completely weird road. I think that's very important, well, because there's no one at school to do it with". Teacher 3 was convinced that it was she who was on the "right" side, not her mundane colleagues in school.

This extended further to a fourth source of inspiration: the so-called Snowball spirit or philosophy, including (A) teacher expertise in class/evaluation, (B) collective intelligence and comradeship, (C) reflection and practice, and (D) contribution and commitment. (Section 2.3). Teacher 3 appreciated M.T. Jang for having offered such Snowball philosophy and "right" directions, which she and other participants *heartily* agreed to and pursued in planning and designing their own classes. Teacher 7 described the hearty consent as follows: In her words, M.T. Jang's opening talks were always "so obvious" to her and "made sense"; it was like "the good words in theoretical textbooks were awakened and approached her alive"; she agreed wholeheartedly, "Right, this is the way to do teaching!" Teacher 10, on the other hand, shared how she and her SIG members inspected and established their educational philosophy in SIG gatherings.

> I wasn't sure if I had a clear educational philosophy, nor did I have clear ideas on or was interested in whether I disliked this and whether I'd like to do that with my kids. But doing Snowball, *we talked a lot in the ER SIG about how a teacher should be and how we should treat our pupils* and so on. I really liked that. (Teacher 10)

She said she loved the in-SIG discussion of macro perspectives on English education.

The Snowball values also invigorated SIG and action research activities. Teacher 9 diagnosed that "M.T. Jang made a good in-group culture" of collaboration, comradeship, contribution, etc. (Sections 4.1.1 & 4.1.2). These recollections clearly showed that Snowball participants were *interpellated* into and *identified* themselves with (cf. Giles and Middleton 2008, p. 43) the set of Snowball values, which became their constant sources of inspiration.

Teacher 6 seized the philosophy of "empowerment" out of the Program structure itself, while Teacher 7 articulated the attitude of "dedication," especially to her students. She knew already that she should value the students the most and implement student-centered teaching, but it was only when she joined Snowball that she realized the true meaning of "student-centeredness" and "dedication as a teacher."

> When I participated in Snowball, I had already felt so close to my students. I felt like, "Oh, I should do this for my students," in a substantial way, not in a bookish way, you know. I learned the concept of student-centeredness from the book, of course, but it became truly meaningful after I joined the Program. [Omission.] *I think teachers' hidden dedication was the key. I mean, every teacher wants to be happy with his students. Snowball helps him elevate his hidden dedication to his students to the maximum possibility, even though he himself sometimes wants to give up.* (Teacher 7)

Teacher 7 went through the process of unlearning and re-learning the meaning of student-centeredness; she said the Program helped her and other participants dedicate themselves to such Snowball values.

A fifth source of inspiration was the participants' experience of success and accomplishment during the Snowball program, which gave the positive affective experience of self-worth and satisfaction. Teacher 12 said that she felt worthwhile whenever she finished a step in the Program and satisfied with the results that she had worked for against all difficulties she faced. She also credited the Program with helping her develop "grit" to

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pursue the things that she planned to pursue. She felt that this was very different from her past self, who had easily given up on things after encountering several difficulties.

> I think Snowball made me achieve my goal that I've always wanted to achieve. Of course, it was not easy, but I tried my utmost to accomplish something in this Program, not like in the past when I gave up on things so easily. I really stuck to my goals and tried really hard to do things that I planned. And then, I somehow accomplished all the things! *Whenever I accomplished things, I felt so worthwhile, and I felt so satisfied with the results that I'd gotten after I tried my best.* (Teacher 12)

Teacher 12 testified that successful results she obtained gave her a very high level of satisfaction.

Discussion thus far shows that Snowball participants had abundant sources of inspirations: the supervisor and highly motivated peers as role models, brilliant practical ideas from them, the screening process itself, Snowball values, and experiences of success, among others. With superb expertise and high motivation, in other words, many of them functioned as "near peer role models", i.e., "peers who are close to our social, professional and/or age level who for some reason we may respect and admire" (Murphey 1998, p. 201). The positive Snowball results support Murphey's (1998) hypothesis that near peer role models are more psychologically attractive and effective motivators in learning. This shows that M.T. Jang was not only a "directive", but also a collaborative, a nondirective, a creative, and/or a self-help/explorative supervisor (Gebhard 1990). She must have played various roles: counsellor, observer, feedbacker, assessor, and process leader (Roberts 1998).

All these inspiration sources must have helped most participants enter the schema level of learning and some of them enter the theory level of learning (Korthagen 2010, Korthagen and Lagerwerf 2001) becoming ready to serve as teacher trainers/educators. As indicated here and there above, further, they brought forth many *healthy* emotional experiences, including but not limited to sense of shame, pain, agony, consolation, thankfulness, courage, thrill and excitement, pride, responsibility, empowerment, dedication, confirmedness, relief, self-worth, a sense of accomplishment, grit, and satisfaction from success. These *affective* responses were distinctive features of Snowball that have made it successful and popular among teachers who wanted to constantly improve themselves as teachers. Such responses also testify that the participants ultimately came to firmly *value* and *internalize* the Snowball philosophy and the *right* ways of pedagogical thinking and teaching (Krathwohl et al. 1964). That is, such inspiration sources constituted a legitimate and steadfast foundation for their transforming pedagogical practices, along with ample emotional supports and chances of successes experienced in person and vicariously which were attained after tenacious exploration in endurance. They, in a nutshell, satisfied the conditions to trigger substantial transformations through small-group dynamics (Vedantam 2010).

All in all, the participants must have successfully experienced changes in all the competency domains in Table 1 except for those for content areas.

4.2 Long-Term Outcomes of the Snowball Program

4.2.1 A culture of sharing

Snowball was distinctive not only in its characteristics but also in its outcomes. The most notable effect was that it contributed to creating a *culture of sharing* among the participants. As mentioned earlier, the Program was based on SIGs, which allowed the members of each SIG to become very close to one another during the one-year period. And every SIG shared their learning results with other SIGs, contributing to the formation of a bigger learning community.

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The atmosphere of teacher learning community spread outside the SIGs and beyond that one-year period. Many Snowball graduates became members of a large teacher learning community that was continuously expanding as the Program proceeded. This was possible mainly because a Snowball group was formed on an always-on and instant chat application. Anyone who had participated in Snowball could join this group to share their ideas and opinions freely any time they wanted. So, even if a member of Snowball Program 1 and another member of Snowball Program 3 had not met in person, they could help each other by sharing their lesson plans, class experiences, effective activities, various assessment tools, and consultations regarding the issues they faced in their schools.

> Well, this is natural among our members. We try to have this passion and ability, develop our expertise, and share things with one another. *Particularly, we share, don't we? I've really loved this!* It's not like 'It'll be me only who's going to do it or know it'. *If something is good, we just open it unconditionally to the public, don't we?, in the group chat room!* (Teacher 6)

> In our group chatroom, we talk about things, you know. We don't have any great intention or purpose, but we talk about really little things. *But then, those little things actually become great things in our group chatroom*. I mean the room itself makes us think like that. When we are in the group chatroom, we come to think "Hmm…I've never thought about it, but others can think this way, or this issue is a very important issue." I think this is possible thanks to the group chatroom. So now, I gain a lot of help just from this group chatroom. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 6 emphasized how naturally they were sharing things in the group chatroom and how she loved it. Teacher 1 stressed how such things led him to think deeper and wider. Both Teacher 6 and Teacher 1 stressed that they could remain in the Snowball teachers' community even after their programs officially ended, and this was possible because all participants could jump in and discuss many things together freely in the unofficial SNS community. The most important point of community building and maintenance was that the participants took part in these activities "voluntarily." Although there was no substantial incentive or reward, many of the participants "voluntarily" opened their classes and ideas to other participants.

Furthermore, many Snowball graduates functioned as mentors and emotional supporters for participants in later programs. They visited program sites to participate in SIG discussions and/or to offer snacks, teas, and coffees. Some participants were even recommended and invited to other English LTE programs as lecturers. Teacher 10 was one of such participants who took on the roles of teacher trainer/educator. Taking on these roles posed a great challenge to her because she was originally an introvert who did not like to give presentations in front of other people. However, as she dedicated herself to the roles that she had taken on, she realized that she learned significantly from the lecturing, which involved active interaction with audience members. She mentioned that "she" was the one who was changed the most through this experience.

> Well … I like the fact that I can share something with others. I was really nervous when I first opened my class to other teachers when I was in the "Extensive Reading" SIG, but then I learned a lot from the mentor teacher, and I also studied a lot about how to give a lecture effectively by myself. I mean, I read a lot of books about that. [Omission.] I feel catharsis when I give a lecture here, and I feel so strongly about each and every teacher in the audience. They are so precious, and so is their feedback. The feedback I get from them makes me improve myself so much. *So, although I didn't like to give a presentation in front of people, Snowball made me change.* (Teacher 10)

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The changes that Teacher 10 mentioned also showed up in schools they teach, where isolationism and even egoism used to be norms. They became more open-minded and were willing to share tips and ideas about teaching in general, ranging from effective English teaching materials, methods, and websites to ways to deal with unruly students in their classes. They began to function as channels to a rich outside reservoir of up-to-date ideas and solutions. If one participant was stuck with a problem in his/her school, (s)he posted the problem up on the Snowball chat board and could immediately get dozens of answers that were practical and based upon other participants' real experiences in the field. Teacher 9 cited the metaphor of "a treasure trove," which was used by some of the participants.

> How can I say this? Well … I heard some teachers use a very nice expression like "a treasure trove," and I think that's it. This is literally a treasure trove. *When I ask a question, many teachers from different schools, they answer back to me*. I mean, they know all the answers and share all the things they know. They just share things like they are in my shoes now. (Teacher 9)

Teachers often have trouble getting answers to their questions, as many of the participants indicated. However, participating in Snowball communities, those teachers realized that they were not alone and that they could have a supportive group that could provide comrades, mentors, friends, and peers throughout their teaching years.

These networks of pedagogical experts supported school-internal and/or -external teacher learning communities where learning and identity change were to happen hand in hand (Wenger 1998), satisfying J. Y. Kim et al.'s (2015) requirement for English LTE program to foster teacher connectedness. The networks seemingly produced high levels of teacher collegiality and helped teachers overcome the problem of *instructional uncertainty* (Brashers 2001) and venture constructivist and other learner-centered types of teaching (Cha and Ham 2012). Such inter-teacher collaboration would help teachers to self-identify and operate curricula for themselves (Y. M. Kim and Cheong 2012). This must have begun to contribute to the formation of a healthy ecology for grass-root educational reforms, which Cha et al. (2019), for instance, had a vision of.

4.2.2 "Designing" student-centered classes

In addition to developing a sharing culture, the participants made substantial efforts to improve their classes by learning from one another during the Snowball program. They mentioned that the Program enabled them to reflect upon their own teaching and re-learn the basic activities that they had to perform as teachers, including clarifying class objectives and sharpening the focus of the class, which were the most basic of the basics that the participants needed to do for every class. However, Teacher 8 mentioned that she stopped attending to these basics as her teaching span was extended. Some participants referred to ceasing these basic activities as a "mannerism," while others expressed this as "getting used to it." Participating in Snowball provided the participants with an opportunity to "break the comfortable shell" that they had been building and to "move forward" with a novice teacher's mind regained. Teacher 8 mentioned that she learned how to set goals at multiple levels, from single classes to an entire semester.

> I know how to design the classes, but I lost the goal, you know, some big theme for the class or what class I want to give to my students. I lost that, so I joined this Snowball program, but then there were so many teachers who gave English literature class in this way, who designed socially participatory classes in that way, and so on and so on. *After I'd seen those teachers, I think I relearned how to set goals again*. I mean, I came to think, "Oh, I should do this, and I should try that," and I actually gave a very well-organized class for each

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and every class. I also learned how to set a goal for one semester, so I think now I know how to look over the “forest,” too. (Teacher 8)

By “forest,” Teacher 8 mainly meant the prolonged vision of the class organization throughout the semester. This shows that she now sets up “overall conceptual goals” (Woods 1996, cited in Richards 1998) as well as for individual classes. However, the participants did not only refer to long-term planning in terms of the length of the timeline. Teacher 9 also referred to long-term planning in terms of changing direction when planning classes. She had been mainly concerned about whether her students would be interested in her class before she joined Snowball. However, during the Program she broadened her perspective in a way that allowed her to contribute to her students' *genuine growth* via her class, so she tried to incorporate multiple aspects that she studied in the Program, such as “transversal competencies” (B. Cho and Jeon 2020) like critical thinking, on top of English proficiency *per se*. This means that she could now embody the 2015 Revision of the National Curriculum in her classroom practices.

Interestingly enough, the reason why Teacher 9 broadened her scope when she designed her class was in line with the next theme, student-centered classes. It was notable that all participant teachers stressed that they had come to view their students as the main subject of education (Freeman and Johnson 1998), leading them to put their students first under all circumstances (cf. Crandall's (2000) learner-centeredness). Teacher 5, who was interested in assessment, started to think about ways to provide her students with feedback that would be useful from their perspectives rather than her own.

Well, I used to think about the “students' interest” as a main factor when I designed a class. For example, if I designed a class, then I focused on how I could make it more interesting and how I could encourage my students' participation. I just thought how I could make my class exciting so that my students could enjoy it, not how I could help my students' growth through my class. I now focus more on that, I mean *students' growth*, when I design a class. *So, I design classes in a way that I can include multiple aspects: not just English proficiency but also critical thinking and so on that I've read about in the book.* (Teacher 9)

I came to think more from the students' perspective. So, I think about how my students would feel when they got this feedback and how they can actually develop themselves. You know, feedback should be meaningful not from the perspective of the giver but from the perspective of the receiver. That's why I think about what meaningful feedback is again and again. You've also seen that in our group chatroom that we talked about how we should not be “helicopter teachers” when we give feedback to our students. I think about this a lot because I become like this as I give more and more feedback to my students. I mean, I try to teach from one to ten when I teach them. So, I think about how I can help my students learn from one to ten not using “that” from one to ten method, what good feedback means, and how I can help their growth in the long run. (Teacher 5)

Taking part in Snowball helped Teacher 5 to reflect upon her own definition of feedback and her way of giving feedback “from one to ten.” Her reflection did not stop there, and she further thought about how she could escape from giving feedback in too much detail, which might hinder students' genuine growth, and move forward to a more constructive method of giving feedback. The participants shared that “students” were the key and “student-centeredness” was the core value of the Snowball program. When the participants stated that they valued “student-centeredness,” they meant that they were focused on student growth. The participants made substantial efforts to improve their pedagogical activities from various perspectives to help their students “actually learn something and grow,” even if just a bit, by taking their classes. This student-centeredness was the fundamental driving force that

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the participants shared, and Teacher 7 expressed this clearly.

> The most memorable thing was that I actually implemented what I have studied in my SIG and was concerned about whether my students would actually like what I've prepared. *I mean, I always focused on my students' growth, I always had my attention on that, and then I revised and revised my lessons in accordance with that.* Yes, that was the most memorable thing. So, for me, the fact that I've been challenged constantly to make my classes more student-centered was the memorable thing of this Snowball program. (Teacher 7)

For Teacher 7, changing the way that she thought about helping her students learn something from her class was the most memorable point of joining the Program. She tried to embody the big idea of professional learning community that teaching is to ensure that "students learn" (DuFour 2004).

The result in this subsection shows that the participants were now capable of naturally reflecting on their own teaching, which is a significant competency to critically modulate and integrate their own knowledge, skills, and attitude (Freeman 1989, Bartlett 1990). With reflective teaching habituated, they set at rest the problem of incongruence between theory-oriented LTE contents and class implementation (K. Chang 2007, J. Y. Kim et al. 2015, M. M. Kim and Cheong 2012, Y.-o. Kim et al. 2008, B. E. Park 2006). Reflecting on their educational philosophy, they further had experienced a Copernican change in their beliefs and attitude about teaching and learning; most of them were constantly thinking about how to improve their classes positioning themselves as *learners* (Freeman and Johnson 1998). They also came to have a drastically different view on the teacher/student relationship: from teacher-centered to learner-centered (Crandall 2000); they must then have developed "teaching maxims" of a drastically different nature (Richards 1998). This means that individually they reconstructed their new teaching identities in the *identity elements* of "roles and responsibilities" and "epistemology" including core values (Clarke 2013). When teachers come to formulate and share different beliefs and renovate their teaching practices, it is natural for them to have come to have built up potentials to change the *cultures of teaching* (Richards and Lockhart 1996) and even *organizational identities* in their own schools (Clarke 2013). Unless supported externally, such flames of innovation are extinguished easily by an organizational power of resistance. Fabulously, however, Snowball graduates seemed to have strong and powerful buttresses from outside Snowball communities. In an importance sense, the Program was continuously maintained to support its participants ideologically as well as practically, and substantially to encourage student growth in front-line schools.

4.2.3 Changes in social positioning

A culture does not only involve a shared system of beliefs or perspectives and commonly accepted practices, but also a community involving individuals and their social relationships (Moran 2001). In this last dimension of culture showed up Snowball's last major outcome: It caused changes in the social positioning of its participants. During the Program, the participants began to view themselves as active "agents" for change in their own schools rather than passive beings. Eight participants mentioned that they had been submissive teachers who followed the given curriculum and orders from the upper level. As mentioned in the last section, however, Snowball helped them change both their teaching practices and their views of themselves. They spoke out about the issues that they faced, made a note of unreasonable school practices, and stood on the side of the students. Although they were still "the minority" in number, they expected that they could make positive changes in the long run if the number of the participants increased as implied by the name of the program, "Snowball." Teacher 6 used the metaphor of a "wasteland" when she described schools, and she felt lonely because she had felt she was one of the few teachers who fought to address

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long-standing issues at schools. However, she was proud that she made a ripple and contributed to the positive changes that her school went through. She said that everything was possible thanks to the Program.

> You know the most important point of the Snowball program was that we, the participants, should become "agents." I remember that word clearly. *Our role is to become well-trained agents in this Program, go back to our wasteland-like schools, fight to address the long-standing issues there, and make a snowball effect like we have learned in this teacher training program.* That's our role, and that's how I pay back those who designed the Program, I believe. Um… I can say that my school has been affected positively by the Program. I am so proud that I am one of them. This is how I come to have pride as a teacher. So, I sometimes feel lonely at school, but I can also stand tall thanks to the fact that I am from Snowball. (Teacher 6)

In addition to changing their self-perceptions, the participants also came to change their views of others. Teacher 12 expressed those others in terms of two different categories. The first category of "other" was her students. Before the Program, she had believed that she should give all of the details to her students even if she did not have confidence in them, so her attitude was rather an oppressive one and she taught in a top-down manner. After its graduation, however, she came to have "more experiences," including but not limited to professional books, academic articles, discussions, presentations, open classes, and the group chatroom, which improved her conviction in her teaching. She now came to persuade her students. Taking a step forward, Teacher 11 even realized that teachers should care for learners truthfully.

> In the past, I "threatened" my students by saying that they should follow me because I believed that "I" was the one who knew the best way for them. *But now, I have come to have more experiences through Snowball, so I have this conviction inside me and can persuade them with some examples as evidence.* (Teacher 12)

> And actually, ... *there are many teachers who love students, um, at that very much*. That is to say, I used to do teaching very hard, but I accepted this very occupationally. … Kind of, *teachers here... there are a lot who like kids whole a lot*. … Ah, I felt, it's not enough for teachers to be good at class. I don't really feel that at school. I'm really sorry to say this. (Teacher 11)

Teacher 12 came to treat her students democratically on more equal terms. Teacher 11 said she came to position learners onto an *amicable* position.

The second category of "other" was peer teachers and administrators. Snowball participants generally positioned peer teachers as partners for collaboration. Teacher 1 said he whole-heartedly helped and worked together with those who responded constructively to his pedagogical suggestions while naturally distancing himself from stubborn peers soaked in mannerism. Teacher 8 said, "The biggest change is that I think I should cooperate with the teachers around me," it is because she came to believe that "there are many great people around me."

Some were more progressive. Teacher 4 stated that "Now, I've thought that not telling them such a thing was not helpful and not being polite." So, she started to suggest more actively, "Wouldn't it be better to improve this in this part?". She was now concerned more about the *real growth* of her peers as teachers, not their feelings. Teacher 12 even took a more aggressive approach. When she had trouble with other teachers, previously, she used to avoid them and kept her distance intentionally, but Snowball helped her become more active in persuading other teachers to do what she believed to be right.

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> In addition, when I thought some peer teachers were "irreconcilable" in some respects, I just gave up upon them and never tried to work with them in the past. *But after Snowball, I had this confidence and started to think, "This is the right way, so let me try to 'beautify' this a bit so that I could persuade them to follow me."* (Teacher 12)

She was putting such peers on to a position of collaborators-to-be. Such an aggressive attitude was possible thanks to the confidence and self-conviction that she gained through the Program.

Being self-confident, Teacher 12 came to raise her voice to administrators as well: "When no budget is available, I ask them to make an adjustment. 'If you don't have a budget, please make one for me.' I sort of say it and get it." In these ways, participants adjusted the positioning of their peer teachers and administrators in the process of improving English education in their own schools.

Finally, the participants were perceived differently by others, and this "difference" was positive. Many Snowball participants initially tended to have trouble finding supportive peers when they tried to implement innovative teaching methods or suggest school reforms based on what they had learned in the Program. However, they were not afraid of taking the initiative, and as time went by, they were recognized and respected by their peer teachers and students as competent and passionate teachers.

> *Now, other teachers know that I am a teacher who studies a lot, so I feel that they don't ignore what I say.* I mean, even if I don't articulate things all the time, other teachers implicitly think I have a solid rationale. Oh, and I have some more cases. Since other teachers know I have interacted with teachers from other schools, if they have questions, they say to me, "Please contact someone from other schools and ask this." And then they trust me if I say to them, "I've contacted other teachers in different schools, and they say this." (Teacher 10)

> Um ... I met my peer teachers in the cafeteria, and one of them who had been supervising third-graders to write SOPs said to me, "Ms. Jeong, all the students wrote about your class in their SOPs." And then, other teachers also agreed with her, saying that the students in their classes also did the same. *I was so impressed and even felt touched because all the teachers in my school recognized my passion and competence somehow.* I felt gratitude that I could gain this recognition and support from the peer teachers in my school thanks to Snowball. (Teacher 2)

Teacher 10 and Teacher 2 talked about how they were able to gain recognition from their peer teachers and their students, respectively. Notably, both participants received recognition from others thanks to their own efforts to practice what they had learned in Snowball. Other teachers valued Teacher 10's opinion because she had participated in the Snowball and other LTE programs ardently and built networks with teachers from other schools. In the same vein, Teacher 2 was praised by and received recognition from her students as well as peer teachers because she tried her best to provide her students with innovative and helpful classes as she had studied in Snowball. With these efforts, the participants were viewed and labeled as "Snowball teachers", who had excellent expertise and a passionate attitude as teachers.

Crucially, Snowball participants established their identities positively, positioned their colleagues as collaborators(-to-be), and in turn came to be recognized and respected by them. Kumaravadivelu (2012) would say that they came to "recognize their identities, beliefs and values" and "perform teaching, theorizing, and dialogizing" (p. 17).

In terms of situated learning, they became *central participants* in their own communities of teaching (Lave and

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Wenger 1991) and gained formal and/or informal positions of leadership in their own schools: a better position to carry forward educational innovations and reforms.

5. Conclusion

This study has aimed to probe the characteristics and substantial outcomes of "Snowball": a long-term English teacher professional development program that was developed in 2015 and ever since offered to in-service teachers for five years by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. To achieve the research goal, we recruited and interviewed 12 graduates from the Program to understand how they characterized the Program and how they believed their pedagogical ideas and practices had been changed when they returned to school.

Snowball has been characterized as having provided (1) self-promoted SIG organization and activities having formed collegial bonds, (2) chances for action research experiences and tenacious reciprocal supports, and (3) abundant sources of inspiration such as good role models, a pride in being selected to take an elite course, a profusion of pedagogical ideas generously offered, reasonable Snowball values, and undergoing success experiences. Through this one-year Program, importantly, the participants came to internalize the set of Snowball values and attitudes including: (A) teacher expertise in class/evaluation, (B) collective intelligence and comradeship, (C) reflection and practice, and (D) contribution and commitment. They were supported to embody these values autonomously in making their own academic and practical explorations: individually and collectively. This must have guaranteed that the participants had their *agency, competence,* and *relatedness* needs satisfied and exerted their *internal* motivation (Deci and Ryan 2000, Dweck 2017), and that the resulting group dynamics did not only help them to modulate or radically transform their teaching identities but also to be able to critically become aware of undesirable teaching practices and formulate their own creative solutions to their common practical problems.

When they came back to school, firstly, Snowball graduates contributed to the promotion of an open culture of sharing, which brought forth teacher collaboration and collegiality. They functioned as ducts of up-to-date ideas and solutions. Secondly, the participants also made substantial efforts to improve their English teaching to be more student-centered; they tried to empower their own students and colleagues, and to agonize for pedagogical long-term planning and implementation and for genuine student growth. These school-internal efforts could be sustained because they were supported technically, emotionally, and philosophically by their expert comrades in their school-external communities of learning, many of which were in turn supported financially by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. The substantial ongoing progress they were making proves that Snowball succeeded to help the participants improve most teacher competencies in Table 1.

These tangible and ideational changes led the "Snowballers" to re-position themselves as more active agents of educational changes in the social world of school; they re-positioned their students as educational protagonists, and their teacher and administrator colleagues as collaborators(-to-be). As their pedagogical renovations were recognized by their peers, consequently, they were naturally put in an official and/or informal positions of leadership: better positions to advance educational reforms by bringing forth changes in the organizational identities of their teaching sites.

Such positive substantial outcomes of the Program lead to the conclusion that Snowball was a tremendous success. This success of Snowball's in turn entails the following: If it aims to bring in genuine improvements in English pedagogy, (1) the LTE program must be based on *genuine* teacher needs; (2) it must allow participants to do *autonomous research* into the problems at the root of their needs; (3) by screening participants strictly, the LTE

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program can provide more sources of inspiration like near peer role models; (4) it must help participants' *genuine* learning communities to persist after graduation with reciprocal acceptance, group cohesion, sharing, caring, contribution, and commitment; (5) it must help participants to (re-)examine and (re-)establish their own pedagogical values. If Conditions (1)-(2) are satisfied, the LTE program will constitute an experiential model. If Condition (3) is achieved, the LTE program enhances its chance for success exponentially. If Condition (4) is satisfied, the LTE program will empower the participants to bring in long-lasting educational improvements. If Condition (5) is satisfied, the participants will establish their own teacher identities and be able to serve as agents for significant transformations in English pedagogy. If all the five conditions are satisfied, you will have a *structural* version of Snowball. For it to *function* well, you will need a competent and devoted leadership.

Future research needs to probe into what outcomes Snowball programs can produce in other regions, into how the Snowball success can lead to educational transformations in front-line schools and schooling, and into how the democratic principles of Snowball can spread out to bring forth educational transformations at higher levels such as those of making educational policies and national curricula.

It should be noted at a macro level that Snowball could achieve such a success because M.T. Jang supported highly motivated participants *fully* as supervisor, and the Program was also *genuinely* supported by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. Its success seemingly highlights the age-old educational principle of 줄탁동시(啐啄同時), 'when a chick wakes up and pecks the shell inside the egg to come out, the mother chicken simultaneously pecks and breaks the shell from outside'.

Korea must *continue* to have a Snowball for successful English education. Perhaps we need ones for other subjects as well.

Acknowledgements

Our foremost gratitude goes to the 12 participant teachers, who have provided their recollections of the Program and the changes they have since experienced, and to two KJELL reviewers and Mr. Hyung Joo Kim and Dr. Seung-Ryul Lee, whose comments and suggestions significantly contributed to the improvement of this paper. Our big thanks also go to three assistant students at Hanyang University who helped us transcribing the interviews: Mss. Ah-Hyeon Cho, Jieun Kang, and Hyeona Lee. We declare, however, that all potential errors and mistakes are solely under our responsibility.

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Examples in: English
Applicable Languages: English
Applicable Level: Tertiary

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