

## Idea Sharing: Becoming a Journal Editor as Professional Development

Wutthiphong Laoriandee

Chulalongkorn University, Thailand

Corresponding author: [wlaorian@gmail.com](mailto:wlaorian@gmail.com)

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### 1. Introduction

Bashevis and Weidenseld (2013) refer to professional development (PD) as skills and knowledge one attains for both personal development and career growth. The impetus for the more pronounced role of PD in TESOL today arises from factors both outside and inside our field. The world of work outside TESOL has changed. Staff are not employed and promoted based solely on their formal educational degrees anymore. We have seen many freelance columnists who are retirees but still employable or an infographic creator working remotely from home without a formal degree but with the expertise through self-learning. In the field of PD in TESOL, personal practical knowledge of TESOL teachers has brought about the shift from a decontextualized presentation of theories and practices of English language teacher education to a sociocultural perspective (Crandall & Christison, 2016). Such a perspective can be adopted through actually getting involved in professional organizations such as the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) or a local organization like Thailand TESOL, joining conferences onsite to develop TESOLers' soft skills and networking, or simply forming a community of practice for materials development among the teachers in the same

department. On the TESOL International Association website, a guide to PD is provided. Nine possible ways for PD and tips for making PD successful and sustainable can be adopted for novice, mid-career, or even semiretired TESOL educators (TESOL International Association, 2024).

## **2. Journal Editor as Professional Development**

Referring to the definition of PD by Bashevis and Weidenseld (2013) above, I will discuss knowledge and especially skills I have gained over two years taking the role of THAITESOL Journal editor for my growth personally and professionally.

## **3. Personal Growth**

The role of a journal editor has fulfilled me both emotionally and skill-wise. I have developed a soft skill set of effective communication, critical thinking, and detail orientation, while the role also entails some psychological rewards.

### **3.1 Soft Skill Set Development**

Becoming a journal editor really requires the effective written communication skills that are filtered through a sociocultural lens. That is, a journal editor needs to contact different groups of people from diverse cultural backgrounds who are involved in the process of publication. On top of that, the communication purpose also varies, whether it be a reviewer invitation email to a scholar, a discussion thread to an author to ask for their overdue revision, or a text message to an editorial team member on the part of work that I have finished. These written communications require different pragmatic adjustments. From my own experience, the very first written communication of each kind is the most challenging. After that previous emails can function as templates I can use in similar situations with other reviewers and authors. I can vividly recount the very first invitation email I wrote to a potential reviewer. Not only did I need the background knowledge about that potential reviewer to include in the email as the justification for inviting him or her, but I also had to accurately describe the database THAITESOL Journal is indexed in. Evaluating an article for a Q1 Scopus-

indexed journal requires a different standard than an article for a journal not indexed in any database. Accurately describing THAITESOL, which is somewhere in the spectrum (indexed in ERIC and TCI Tier 2 at the time this article was written), was not an easy task at the first attempt.

In addition, written communication of a journal editor is usually high stakes. Clarity of a message is very crucial. For instance, two weeks ago I received a phone call from an author claiming that her manuscript was not further proceeded by the editorial team though she had tried to reach the team by email! With frustration, I checked my email, and luckily, found the rejection letter with reviewers' comments I had sent to her months ago—which must be toned down to lighten the weight of the rejection on the author but at the same time must be clear enough not to be read otherwise. I took a screenshot of that email and sent it to her. I did not receive any more complaint phone calls from her—case closed. From this incident, I learned that an editor's decision message must be clear when sent to an author to prevent any dispute that may subsequently arise. In addition, keeping track of each manuscript status is crucial. Missing one step, such as a lost rejection letter to an author after the decision has long been made, could detrimentally affect the journal's and editor's reputation.

Critical thinking and detail orientation are also indispensable skills a journal editor needs to develop. When an author sends a manuscript to a journal, they do not only expect insightful feedback from reviewers. The journal editor needs to give feedback to the author as well especially when desk-rejecting a manuscript to save reviewer resources and time for a more qualified one. The critical thinking comes into play to justify the desk-rejection decision of the manuscript. As we are talking about giving reasons for the high-stakes rejection decision to a well-educated author, a journal editor needs to well develop critical thinking and detail orientation to point out weaknesses of the manuscript. These skills of an editor are also for the benefit of the journal readers screening only quality research for publication. Detail orientation is needed again when the editor reads the

copyedited version of the manuscript before production. Some academic journals do not hire proofreaders or staff for page formatting. The editor's roles may also include these as well. Even when a journal hires a page formatter, their English proficiency may not suffice to detect misspellings or citation mistakes. The editor still needs to read the final product and pay attention to every fine detail before publishing a manuscript.

### **3.2 Psychological Rewards**

Another aspect of personal growth is related to the inner self. In the context of Thailand, publish or perish cannot be truer when many scholars need publication to avoid the termination of their employment contract. Some graduate students also publish their research as a graduation requirement. I sometimes receive submissions from university lecturers whose employment contract is about to end, and who are in a desperate need of assistant professorship to stay in the university. In our editorial team, we always mark these cases urgent and, with our utmost effort, facilitate them by expediting the screening process. However, the quality of accepted papers must not be compromised, and the publication decision is not the editor's call but the reviewers'. The cooperation of the authors in revising the manuscript in time is very crucial. In these cases, I will give them even more initial comments and sometimes ask the authors to revise even before I send the manuscript out to reviewers. This, I believe, helps reduce the chance of rejection by reviewers and ensures that the quality of their final work meets the standard for the assistant professor promotion. When they succeed and give their thanks, this feels very rewarding.

## **4. Career Development**

Taking the role of a journal editor does not only help me get to know more people in TESOL, but also reconnect with my old PhD friends and professors who are among those invited to be reviewers.

#### **4.1 Professional Network Expanding and Strengthening**

Getting to know more TESOL professionals who are my journal's authors and reviewers strengthens my existing professional network. THAITESOL is the official journal of the Association of English Teachers in Thailand (Thailand TESOL). Being the journal editor, I am a committee member of Thailand TESOL as well. Just two weeks ago, one of Thailand TESOL committee members, who has also reviewed manuscripts for the journal, invited me to join his new research project, and we applied for a research grant together. In addition, one of my old PhD friends at my alma mater, who has published in my journal, invited me to give a lecture on Global Englishes at her university. Had I not taken this role, I would not have received these professional opportunities through my expanding professional network.

#### **4.2 Keeping Abreast of New Knowledge in the Field**

As a journal editor, it is crucial that I need to keep abreast of new knowledge in TESOL because editors should know the trend of research studies and acceptable research designs for particular subfields. One way of keeping myself abreast of new knowledge is to attend academic conferences. In the past two years, I have attended conferences by AAAL, KOTESOL, and the Extensive Reading Foundation (ERF) among others. Such conferences usually organize Meet the Editors session, where I learn the nature of other related journals. For example, I learned from attending KOTESOL 2021 that Korea TESOL Journal has a mentoring system, and it accepts only a manuscript that has Korea related content (Shaffer, 2021).

Being the editor means that I have thoroughly read all papers in my journal in the past two years. I have learned about new research areas and how scholars conduct them. Being familiar with all the papers in the journal during the past two years means I can instantly locate them when needed for my other work. When I wrote a grant proposal for a secondary school teacher training program, part of my full-time job as Deputy Director at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute, I

cited a nationwide survey of over 4,000 English teachers conducted by Poonpon (2021) on secondary school teachers' needs for professional development programs. Fortunately, possibly due to the solid proposal with the citation of a large-scale survey, a generous grant for the training program was approved.

## **5. Considerations When in an Editorial Team**

### **5.1 Workload**

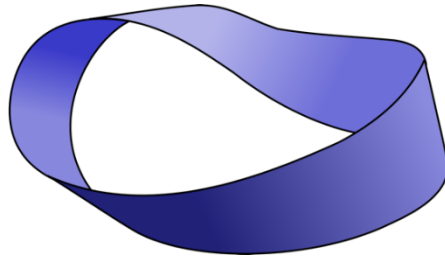
If you are approached to be in the editorial team for a journal or conference proceedings, whether that position is an associate editor or an editor of a local journal or an international one, I believe that these considerations can be applied to your situation. First, the job of an editor or an associate editor is very laborious. You will find yourself spending more time than you thought doing initial screening, finding suitable reviewers, switching to new reviewers when your invitation is declined, compiling reviewers' comments, contacting authors regarding review results, proofreading, and formatting articles. From my own experience, if a paper is accepted, there will always be more than one round of revision. The revised version that the author sends back to you will still have some slips on spellings, grammar, and oftentimes citations. You will need to give comments and bounce it back to the author for at least one more round. If your journal also has a paper version, you will also need to deal with the printing company. All this work has firm deadlines as journal issues are set to be released by a certain date. For some journals, there is also the post-production process such as sending out a letter of appreciation to reviewers, answering questions about compensation to reviewers, and doing public relations work on the newly released issue. I have also been requested by authors after the papers have been published to change their contact information and make a clearer remark for the corresponding author as these types of information matter for their workload count at their affiliation. For journals that are preparing to be indexed in a certain database, the preparation for it could include increasing the number of papers per issue and inviting more international reviewers and editorial board members, for example.

## **5.2 Good Team and Support**

One key consideration for readers who are deciding to accept the role of a journal editor or associate editor is knowing people in your team. If you are complete strangers who come from different universities, you may want to meet them in person for a few times or ask around about the working styles of people in your future editorial team. In my case, I knew the associate editor very well even before working for the journal. Therefore, it is very easy for us to discuss work, to push each other, and to frankly remind each other when one is behind with the journal work. Another important consideration is the editorial team should have clear work roles, and the amount of work for each person in the team should be suitable for the position they have. To exemplify, my associate editor knows well about the journal system. We have agreed that he will take care of the system for assigning reviewers and sending out results through the system. As I have built a large network of TESOL professionals through my main role at my university, I am responsible for finding reviewers and sending out formal acceptance letters to authors. Simply put, in our team, we maximize each other's expertise and network.

## **6. Conclusion: The Editor's Journey on the Möbius Strip**

My arduous journey goes on a metaphorical Möbius strip that has no end, whilst editor. This represents two senses of the role. First, a journal editor is like a worker ant marching on the Möbius strip with obstacles along the way as sometimes this worker ant must walk upside down. Once one manuscript is published, a new submission is waiting for an initial screening. Sometimes while waiting for an overdue result from a reviewer, I must reply to an email from the author regarding a longer process than usual. And the loop continues. Second, on a more positive note, the editorial work can lead to more opportunities and professional development. I have been invited to Meet the Editors session three times over the two years in this role. My reviewers become my speakers at my university, and the journal authors are invited to review manuscripts. The influence that the role has on my personal and professional work does not end like the journey on the Möbius strip (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1***The Möbius strip*

Becoming a journal editor is a unique but underdiscussed professional development option for mid-career or experienced professionals. In the time that TESOL scholars need to publish, whether due to the push from their universities or the push from their own research inquiries, there must be someone who facilitates the publication process. Journal editors are key people who make the field and TESOL professionals' life move forward while at the same time the editor walks on the Möbius strip in loop. TESOL professionals need to think more strategically about their work lives with a focus on professional development options in which their knowledge and skills maximize their value for their affiliation (England, 2019). The editor's journey on this Möbius strip is very challenging, but I have strengthened my personal and professional muscles while walking on it.

**7. About the Author**

Wutthiphong Laoriandee is an assistant professor and Deputy Director for International Affairs at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute, Thailand. His research interests are English for tourism, world Englishes, and linguistic landscape. He is Editor-in-Chief of THAITESOL Journal, the official journal of the Association of English Teachers in Thailand (Thailand TESOL). He is also a committee member of the Thailand Extensive Reading Association (TERA). He can be reached at [wlaorian@gmail.com](mailto:wlaorian@gmail.com).



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