



By Tessa Woodward

## Finding balance, then staying interested: the importance of Continuous Professional Development

Most English language teachers find that, as our careers progress, our training and professional development needs evolve.

We usually need some kind of initial teacher training in order to get our first job as a language teacher. Once we have got one, we enter into the dizzy world of real students, real colleagues and real bosses. Just preparing lessons and turning up on time, in the right room, in the correct building, all neat and tidy, is usually enough to keep us very busy.

Once we have found our balance at work, we need to learn more and fast! We need to learn about different class groupings, different materials, discipline, changing levels and helping students with exams. We spend long hours at work. Long years too! And then, at some point, we find we have settled and learned, and that we know a thing or two. We have become competent and maybe more confident, with routines that work.

At that point, we need to keep learning for slightly different reasons, perhaps to deepen our professional relationships with students or to keep interested in the work. Or we may need to deal with a new challenge, such as teaching a subject through English (CLIL) or a new age range of students. We are also affected by changes in our own institution, our national government or our industry. These can throw all our routines, materials and ways of teaching up in the air.

However, the wonderful thing about working in the world of education is that, as teachers, we are used to thinking about learning and can make sure we ourselves are learning.

Below is an extract from a chart collated in 2004, adapted from one by Fiona Balloch. It shows some examples of different ways of developing professionally. As well as reading through the ideas on the left, you could make a note of and think more about the things that you already do and would like to do in the columns on the right.





## List of some possible Continuing Professional Development (CPD) activities

### 1. Associations, meetings, committees

CPD Activity	Do I do this?	My thoughts/actions
Attend meetings of a professional association		
Have structured subject discussions with colleagues		
Participate in staff development meetings/quality circles		
Do interviews with other teachers		

### 2. Conferences, seminars, fairs, courses

CPD Activity	Do I do this?	My thoughts/actions
Produce and deliver a professional presentation or lecture (where this is not part of normal work duties)		
Attend a seminar, workshop or conference		
Organise formal professional events		
Attend a course or do self-study (which may or may not lead to examination or assessment)		

### 3. Publications, materials, articles, papers

CPD Activity	Do I do this?	My thoughts/actions
Write or evaluate articles, text books, digital learning tools, learning materials, etc.		
Review and pilot materials for a publisher		
Write a discussion paper or report for your department		

### 4. Consultancy, advising

CPD Activity	Do I do this?	My thoughts/actions
Do consultancy work		



### 5. Job enrichment

CPD Activity	Do I do this?	My thoughts/actions
Work shadow (follow and observe to gain expertise)		
Try a job enrichment scheme (with expanded responsibilities/tasks/roles, etc.)		
Visit another school or institution to find out about a successful innovation		
Share jobs		

### 6. Observation, mentoring

CPD Activity	Do I do this?	My thoughts/actions
Be observed or tutored by peers; have a mentor		
Observe or peer tutor; be a mentor		
Team teach/Team work		
Be observed by a line manager		
Observe yourself		

### 7. Professional enquiry projects

CPD Activity	Do I do this?	My thoughts/actions
Try action research, classroom-based or office-based teaching projects		
Write a blog or journal		
Analyse sections of student journals		
Write and discuss case studies or critical incidents		

Extract taken from Woodward (2004) *Ways of Working with Teachers*, TW Publications



Let's look at two of the ideas in detail to see how you might actually do them. First, you might choose the idea of writing a blog or journal from section 7 above. One way of doing this would be to take time at the end of a week's teaching to consider what events have stuck in your mind. The events could be ones that amused, puzzled, pleased or irritated you. You could write down a few notes on these, taking care to record who was involved, where and when they took place, what happened (zooming in on the detail), and what the wider context was (zooming out). It's a good idea to keep these notes together in a folder or notebook. After a few weeks, reread your notes and see if you can see any patterns emerging. Then consider why the events happened and why they stuck in your mind. (David Tripp's classic book *Critical Incidents in Teaching* gives extremely interesting information on how to do all this.)

Alternatively, you might start with the idea of having a structured subject discussion with colleagues taken from section 1 above. Your first topic could be *Continuing Professional Development (CPD)* and the chart above might be useful to get things started. You could arrange a CPD meeting with your fellow teachers in which you look at the chart together. You could then pool your ideas on which organizations to join, what events to go to, or what topics to discuss. You could also consider how to go about putting in a proposal to speak at a conference.

Since the chart above was created in 2004, wonderful things have been happening for teachers online. We now have online conferences, forum discussions, webinars and teacher websites with a lot of useful resources. So, even if we can't spare the money, time or energy to go to conferences, etc, we can still learn extremely interesting things without leaving our computers. Combining this learning with a study buddy or in-house, professional development discussions with colleagues can be a very productive way of working.

Whichever way you choose to find your balance or to stay interested in your work and in your students, I hope you will enjoy exploring the resources provided here!