Do-It-Yourself ELT Professional Development
by Tomiko Breland

Lifelong learning requires dedication and effort. For educators, this means continuing professional development (PD). Sometimes, the one-size-fits-all PD provided by schools or organizations just doesn't cut it, and, sometimes, the PD is too brief, too superficial, or just irrelevant to your needs. So—what can you do?

Sometimes, you just have to do it yourself (DIY). Here are 10 free resources to get you started.

Create a Personal PD Plan

The first step to DIY PD is to develop your personal PD plan, which will serve as an aid and a guide as you pursue your development goals. Your personal PD plan can be as formal or as informal as you'd like; most plans include, at minimum:

- a self-assessment
- a list of resources available to you
- goals and actions
- a timeline
- assessment

This guide from the New Jersey Department of Education offers a great template for getting started, including some excellent questions for you to ask yourself as you plan. Below are some resources and ideas to help you get started developing your English language teaching (ELT) personal PD plan.

DIY Professional Development Resources

Use these resources in your free time to improve your practice and keep up-to-date in the field.

1. Readingrockets.com: PD Webcasts

These free 45- or 60-minute webcasts cover a number of PD topics, though not all are ELT related. However, there are gems among them for whenever you have the time to watch, and they include recommended readings and discussion questions. Some topics covered are assessment of English language learners (ELLs), academic language and ELLs, and ELLs with learning disabilities.

2. British Council: Podcasts, Webinars, and Seminars

The British Council offers free podcasts consisting of interviews with ELT experts and covering various topics and news in ELT. Most touch on classroom practice, activities, and resources as well. The British Council also offers a monthly series of free webinars for continued PD. Watch recordings or attend live; past webinars include such topics as using ELT to raise social awareness about mobility disability, how to become an ELT materials writer, and how to move

into language school management. Their free seminar series is intended to provide a forum for ELT professionals to discuss the latest developments in the field; some include training materials.

3. Stanford English Learner Library of Resources

This library hosts the course materials from Stanford University's now defunct Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development (CLAD) Program; it contains more than 100 videos to help train educators working with primary and secondary level ELLs. Videos include lectures, teacher reflections, and classroom practice examples, and cover a wide range of teaching topics, including vocabulary development, assessment, and content-based instruction.

4. Coursera

Coursera is an education platform that partners with universities and organizations to offer free courses online. The site covers just about every topic and field, and though it has a small selection of courses on English language teaching, you will find courses on some of the less familiar aspects of language and on improving teaching effectiveness. Over a period of (usually 4 to 9) weeks, you'll watch video lectures, take quizzes, and connect with your instructor and classmates. Look for courses such as "Shaping the Way We Teach English: The Landscape of English Language Teaching," and "The Bilingual Brain."

5. Publications

Sometimes, it's easy to forget that reading is a form of PD. These free online publications offer myriad articles and resources to help English language teachers improve their practice and keep up-to-date in their field:
- *TESOL Newsletters*: TESOL International Association publishes a monthly e-newsletter, *TESOL Connections*, with practical feature articles and resources on all aspects of ELT. The association's 21 interest sections also each publish newsletters specific to their topics, including intercultural communication, program administration, and CALL.
- *The Internet TESL Journal*: Previously an online journal, this resource is now a website that houses articles on research and teaching techniques, and offers lesson plans, handouts, and useful links.
- *ELTWO*: This online journal from ELTWorldOnline.com is published by the Centre for English Language Communication at the National University of Singapore.
- *Blogs*: There are countless blogs out there that provide excellent sources of PD for English language educators. A few worth checking out are
  - The Colorín Colorado blog, "Common Core and ELLs" (Generally U.S.-focused but with many blog posts that are useful and relevant for international contexts)
  - "Larry Ferlazzo's Websites of the Day" (a site devoted primarily to discussing resources to help you teach ESL/EFL, with an excellent and extensive "best of" series)
  - The TESOL Blog, which hosts a number of regular bloggers on topics such as teacher education, educational technology, and second language writing.

- The British Council TeachingEnglish blog, which hosts a number of bloggers on ELT topics each month.
- *Education Week'*s Learning the Language blog is an excellent resource for keeping up-to-date on ELL research and news.

6. Colorín Colorado: Webcasts

The Colorín Colorado webcast series, created in collaboration with the American Federation of Teachers, offers nine webcasts featuring experts in ELT. The 45-minute webcasts include recommended readings and discussion questions and cover such basics as academic language and ELLs and assessment of ELLs.

7. American TESOL Institute Free Friday Webinars

Friday webinars (4 pm EST), open to the public, are hosted by Shelly Terrell, online professor and instructional designer. Though hosted on the American TESOL Institute website, the webinars are mostly general professional development and mainly technology focused, for example, "Learn Collaboratively with Free Web Tools and Apps" and "Ways to Get Technology for Your Classes." You can access her past presentations on her slideshare page.

DIY Professional Development Ideas: Take Action

Some of these ideas for DIY PD require collaboration and learning new technologies before you can begin—but they *all* require effort. The more you put into your PD, the more you'll take from it. Get started!

8. Host an Edcamp (Unconference)

Edcamps are "unconferences" that are held and hosted by the participants; the attendees (teachers) set the agenda at the start of the event and offer to present/facilitate, and sessions are then posted on a board for others to view. Sessions are hands-on and formatted as discussions rather than lectures, and there are generally no sponsors, because it's free to host. Check out resources for organizing an Edcamp, and consider hosting an ELT Edcamp at your school or organization to see what your peers have to share.

9. Build a PLN

PLNs, or personal/professional/personalized learning networks, are digital, global networks in which educators connect, share, collaborate, and learn. You can start your PLN in myriad ways, but the easiest is to dive into social media and other digital conversations: Start a Twitter account, read and write blog posts, begin a Pinterest board, build a circle of connected educators on Google+ . . . the list goes on. Edutopia offers a good primer on PLNs, and Edublogs Teacher Challenges hosts a great website for building your PLN. Also, check out this article in *TESOL Connections* with five easy steps to get you started.

10. Get Tech-Savvy

If building a PLN from the ground up sounds a bit too daunting, you could begin by familiarizing yourself with current technology. Choose at least one tech tool that would be useful in your teaching or in building a PLN, and assign yourself some goals. For example:

- **Twitter:** Open an account, find at least 10 other users to follow, tweet useful teaching advice at least three times a week, get at least 25 followers.
- **Blog:** Choose a blogging platform (e.g., Wordpress, Tumblr, Blogger); create a blog, complete with a mission and vision; blog at least once a week; get at least 20 subscribers.
- **Google+:** Familiarize yourself with at least five Google+ tools, host at least one educational podcast and one Google Hangout (with video), learn to use the Google+ mobile app, join at least two Google+ communities of interest.
- **Pinterest:** Open an account, create a private board for yourself of all your teaching resources and worksheets, create a collaborative board for other teachers to post their resources and get at least 10 teachers to post, create a collaborative board for your students to complete a specific project, read up on copyright and Creative Commons licensing for intellectual property.

Remember: Once you've achieved the goals you set for yourself in your PD plan, you're not done. Continue to update your personal PD plan, and use it as a career-long tool for growth. A personal PD plan changes with your needs and your teaching context, and lifelong learning is never finished.

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