

Summer Professional Development for TESOL Educators

by Kristen Lindahl

In the United States, the summer season is upon us, and it is always difficult to tell who is happier at the prospect of a nice long vacation...the students or the teachers! Although vacation is a great way to recharge your proverbial teacher “batteries,” it is also an excellent opportunity to conduct some professional development (PD) on your own time and about your own interests. In fact, one of the characteristics of effective professional development is *personalization*, or the notion that PD is more effective when teachers feel it is relevant to their interests, strengths, and context (Matterow, 2015). So, if you are looking for some new ways to add some PD to your SPF for little to no cost, read on!

Book Study

Go “old school” this summer and pick up a book! Sometimes the school year is so busy, innovating your teaching practice might feel like you are trying to fix an airplane while you are also in charge of flying it. Reading during the summer break allows you to dedicate attention to new developments in TESOL education while you have the time to process new content and evaluate how it might apply to you and your teaching inventory. Some recently published books on my summer reading list include:

- [*Boosting Achievement: Reaching students with Interrupted and Minimal Education*](#), by Carol Salva with Anna Matis (Seidlitz Education, LLC). If you are working with newcomers or students with interrupted formal education, this book seeks to provide learning strategies and innovative approaches to meeting the cognitive, affective, and linguistic needs of this population. There are fewer resources out there for this particular population, so it is much needed.
- [*Social Justice in English Language Teaching*](#), edited by Christopher Hastings and Laura Jacob (TESOL Press). This new collection discusses ways that educators can identify areas of privilege in English language teaching (ELT) and address social (in)justice in a variety of TESOL teaching contexts. This timely topic may help you both evaluate your own teaching and answer tough questions from your students or colleagues about language policies and language rights.
- [*Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language: A Teacher Self-Development and Methodology Guide*](#), by Jerry G. Gebhard (University of Michigan Press). In its third edition, this text is, in itself, a teacher development tool that can be used by pre- or in-service educators. Three sections (self-development, principles of ELT, and teaching language skills) guide the reader through his or her own pedagogical self-development in ESL or EFL contexts.
- [*Unlocking English Learners’ Potential: Strategies for Making Content Accessible*](#), by Diane Staehr Fenner and Sydney C. Snyder (Corwin). Designed for content and TESOL teachers, this volume includes strategies, examples, templates, and activities for increasing English learners’ access to the curriculum in K–12 settings. It promises a

comprehensive toolbox for teachers who want a key resource they can revisit throughout their career.

Tech Exploration

Go “new school” this summer and check out a new app for your smart device that you can use in your classroom. Taking time during the summer to learn new technology and trying it out with some of your already-existing classroom materials might be more effective than trying out technology for the first time with your class. Using the new app over the summer will give you a chance to notice any challenges you might have and allow you to explore how you might use the app to augment your instruction in different ways. Some apps that I am anxious to try with my own students include:

- [Socrative](#) is billed as a “classroom engagement” app that allows teachers to administer quizzes, ask open-ended or other quick questions, or receive exit tickets about content in a particular lesson. An impressive feature that distinguishes Socrative from other quiz-type apps is that it creates reports of your assessments and saves them to your account so you can download to Google Drive and track class/individual performance over time.
- [Plickers](#) is an assessment-type tool like Socrative or Kahoot, but unlike these, your students *do not need devices*. This is crucial for classroom settings where the teacher is the only one with a smart phone or tablet, such as in working with young children or where there is variable access to technology. By printing out and using Plicker cards, teachers conduct formative multiple-choice assessments by scanning the cards as the students hold up their answers.
- [Class Dojo](#) is a more inclusive app that aims to build classroom community. Teachers can use it to form groups, give group and individual feedback, create digital portfolios, and share classroom moments with parents and/or students. It is a sort of positive feedback–social media platform that is privacy protected and free for teachers.

Webinars

Along the lines of technology, webinars allow you to participate in a course—like professional development, but on your own schedule and in your own setting. Several organizations host webinars throughout the summer; here are a few that appeal directly to TESOL educators.

- [TESOL International Association](#) hosts webinars on everything ELT from grammar instruction and assessment to pronunciation and academic interaction. Self-study seminars let you determine the pace.
- [Colorín Colorado](#) posts webcasts that feature many TESOL/applied linguistics scholars and educators. Each 45-minute webcast has a discussion with the researchers, suggested readings, and discussion questions. Topics range widely and include academic language, comprehension, assessment, learning disabilities, and reading.
- [National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition](#) (NCELA) posts webinars on all aspects of English language education. Focused more on U.S. K–12 populations, the webinars cover topics like Latino dual language learners in early childhood education,

students with interrupted formal education, refugees, the U.S. Common Core, and even working with Native American students.

Planning Time

Instead of trying to incorporate 20 new ideas for the coming year into a few months, summer is an excellent opportunity to pick one or two units to innovate. You may also want to use the time to create efficiency for yourself down the line by making class sets of dice, laminating anchor activities or anchor charts, creating new vocabulary flash cards, and so on. Having those things ready before the school year begins again can save you hours of time once your students return. Websites that provide myriad teacher ideas for classroom management and planning are [Pinterest](#) and [Teachers Pay Teachers](#), where you can purchase resources inexpensively, or even sell some of your own.

Regardless of the type of PD you choose to do this summer, it is important to remember to take care of yourself, too. Teaching is a rewarding, albeit emotionally taxing profession, so it is crucial to give yourself time to enjoy the outdoors, be with your friends and family, travel, or indulge in your favorite pastimes. Failing to practice self-care can actually impact your relationships, both personal and professional (Roberts, 2015). Thus, building up your own emotional reserves will enable you to be more present and energetic when school begins again in the fall.

References

- Matterow, A. (2015). What does effective professional development for teachers look like? *Teacher Match*. Retrieved from <https://www.teachermatch.org/blog/effective-professional-development-for-teachers/>
- Roberts, E. A. (2015). Why self-care is important for your mental and physical health. *Healthy Place*. Retrieved from <http://www.healthyplace.com/blogs/buildingselfesteem/2015/09/why-self-care-is-important-for-your-mental-physical-health/>.

Kristen Lindahl holds a PhD in linguistics with a specialization in L2 teacher education from the University of Utah. She is currently assistant professor of bicultural-bilingual studies at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where she teaches pre-service ESL/TESOL educators at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. Dr. Lindahl has taught K–12 and college ESL, and actively pursues consulting and coaching teachers of English learners in public and English language schools around the globe.