Sophie's Choices: One TESOL Professional's Journey[1]

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Abstract

While conducting a qualitative, semi-structured interview study that investigated the role of program administrators and managers in the field of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), the author encountered a TESOL professional whose 30-year career as an instructor, administrator, and owner of her own language school was so inspirational as to warrant its own exploration as a continuous professional development case study. Using the conceptual framework of continuous professional development (CPD) through the lenses of critically reflective practice and transformative and transformational learning (Brookfield, 2017; Cranton, 1996; Freire, 2007; Mezirow, 1991) and the methodological framework of the use of narratives in TESOL and teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Pavlenko, 2002), the author unravels each step of Sophie's career as a guidebook for other TESOL professionals who might be contemplating a similar journey. The author's findings highlight the impetus and decision-making processes behind each transition in her career trajectory and concludes by illuminating what Sophie identified as lessons learned. Since many TESOL professionals aspire to open their own language schools in an English as a foreign language (EFL) context, the lessons learned from that enterprise were delineated separately. The critical roles preservice preparation, CPD, and effective supervision and mentorship play when transitioning into administrative positions were identified as areas for further investigation and research, including how modifications in these areas might foster a more seamless professional evolution into entrepreneurship.

Resumen

Mientras realizaba un estudio de entrevista semiestructurada cualitativa que investigaba el papel de los administradores y gerentes de programas de la enseñanza del inglés a hablantes de otros idiomas (TESOL), el autor se encontró con una profesional de TESOL cuya carrera de 30 años como profesora, administradora, y propietaria de su propia escuela de inglés, fue una inspiración que justificó su propia exploración como un estudio de caso de desarrollo profesional continuo. Utilizando el marco conceptual del desarrollo profesional continuo (CPD) a través de los lentes de la práctica críticamente reflexiva y el aprendizaje transformativo y transformacional (Brookfield, 2017; Cranton, 1996; Freire, 2007; Mezirow, 1991) y el marco metodológico del uso de narrativas en TESOL y docentes en la investigación narrativa como desarrollo profesional (Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Pavlenko, 2002), el autor desentraña cada paso de la carrera de Sophie como una guía para otros profesionales de TESOL que podrían estar contemplando una trayectoria similar. El autor concluye iluminando lecciones generales aprendidas y lecciones específicas para abrir y administrar una escuela de inglés propia, que es una aspiración de muchos de los que enseñan inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) en sus países de origen. También se aclara cómo la preparación previa al servicio, el desarrollo profesional continuo y la supervisión y tutoría efectivas son cruciales y pueden necesitar ser modificados para fomentar esta evolución profesional hacia puestos administrativos y emprendimientos.

Introduction

While the author was conducting a qualitative, semi-structured interview study that explored the role that program administrators and managers play in supporting their instructors in adult, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs in the United States (in press), he interviewed a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) professional who has over 30 years of experience in the field. During their 90-minute interview, Sophie (a pseudonym) shared her journey living outside the United States and returning home to study TESOL on the graduate level. After working for many years as an instructor for adult, emergent bi/multilingual learners (EBLs), she transitioned to administrative work in adult ESOL programs, eventually opening and running her own language school for EBLs for 10 years. She then transitioned into academic work. Given that many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors study TESOL in English-dominant countries with the dream of opening and operating their own language schools, the story of Sophie's professional choices and journey might prove to be instructive and inspirational.

Prior to conducting the original study, a search of the extant research literature on the Education Source and ERIC databases revealed that the professional preparation, development, and ongoing support for program administrators of adult ESOL programs, especially instructors who transition into administration, is particularly absent. Consequently, the purpose of the study on which this qualitative narrative case study

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emerged was to explore how program administrators' feelings of preparedness, efficacy, and agency impact the way they manage their programs and address the diverse and complex needs of their teachers, staff, and students. Sophie's responses in this study prompted a deeper inquiry into the lessons that she has learned throughout her professional career, especially how she leveraged her teaching experience to administer programs and to open her own language school. The case study detailed in this article was guided by the following research questions:

1. *How did Sophie leverage her preservice preparation as an instructor and her teaching experience to transition into administrative positions and manage adult ESOL programs?*

2. *How did Sophie support the professional development and mentor her program staff and instructors?*

3. *How did Sophie's professional evolution and sense of agency influence her decision to assume administrative positions and to open her own adult ESOL school?*

Conceptual Framework

The analysis of Sophie's interview and the telling of the story of her professional journey are framed conceptually by continuous professional development (CPD) through the lenses of critically reflective practice and transformative and transformational learning (Brookfield, 2017; Cranton, 1996; Freire, 2002; Mezirow, 1991). Although Pavlenko's (2002) use of narratives in the field of TESOL has been used as a theoretical framework elsewhere (Housel, 2021), combining the use of narratives and Johnson and Golombek's (2002) teachers' narrative inquiry as professional development seemed more aligned with the methodological framework used in this study and will be discussed in the methods section.

Continuous Professional Development

Many have affirmed that CPD and support from colleagues and supervisors are essential to ensuring ongoing growth and evolution for educational professionals (Bergeron, 2008; Brannan & Bleistein, 2012; Brookfield, 2017; Cranton, 1996; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Milner, 2002). In addition to more formal mechanisms of support, Thacker (2017) highlighted the "importance of informal professional learning" that is "ongoing, context-based, and collaborative" (p. 50). Brookfield (2017) would argue, however, that meaningful growth and change for an educator must begin with private self-reflection that is confirmed through critical conversations with peers to avoid self-deception, distortion, or denial. We should all strive to gain this critical clarity so we can remain open to alternatives, including changing our educational and vocational roles over the course of our careers. In this way, by fortifying and raising our voices, we develop agency as educational professionals that connects our critical reflections to meaningful action.

Cranton (1996) would affirm the importance of Brookfield's critical self-reflection as a mechanism to transform our learning (Mezirow, 1991) and then our practice (Mermelstein, 2018; Schön, 1987). Farrell (2012) called this same process "reflection-for-action." In this way, "self-directed learning about our practice, critical reflection on our work, and our own transformative development lead us naturally into the role of change agent" (Cranton, 1996, p. 140). Freire (2007) would expand the notion of change agent to include societal change, not only altering individual teaching practice. Cranton acknowledged that maintaining the status quo and not challenging existing practices is often easier, especially when confronted with recalcitrant colleagues or in large, entrenched institutions and bureaucracies. As educators of adult EBLs and as agents of change, we must often create our own opportunities to realize our visions of change. Such change might include more student-centered, equitable, and inclusive pedagogy and workplace dynamics that support the evolution, growth, and best practices of our instructors and other staff. Becoming a critically reflective practitioner who develops a sense of agency and purpose and transforms her practice into meaningful and transformative social action seems particularly relevant to Sophie's story. By changing her own practice, she acted as a role model, especially to other women, and likely inspired them and other marginalized people to assume positions of agency and leadership for needed societal change, a foundational role for educators that was advocated by Freire (2002).

Positionality and Terminology

The author has worked with adult EBLs as a classroom instructor, counselor, and program administrator for over 20 years and as a licensed social worker for over 30 years. In addition, endorsing the work of Otheguy et al. (2015) and Colombo et al. (2019), he prefers the term, *emergent bi/multilingual learner*, because it

affirms students' existing linguistic capabilities, confronts the supremacy of English in English-dominant countries, and challenges the deficit perspectives of learners acquiring English as an additional language in countries like the United States. Similarly, the terminology, learning English as an *additional* versus *second* language, acknowledges the linguistic strengths of our students and their families who are bi- or multilingual.

Methodology

Participant

Sophie was recruited from a large metropolitan area in the northeastern United States. She has been working in the field of TESOL as an instructor, administrator, proprietor of her own language school, and clinical supervisor since 1990. She is bilingual (English/German) and taught adult EBLs, both international students and immigrants to the United States for 25 years. She held administrative positions for seventeen years, seven as an academic coordinator and ten as the owner/director of an ESOL school for adults. Since 2020, she has worked as a clinical supervisor and mentor to graduate TESOL students.

According to Patton (2015), "one in-depth case" can "provide rich and deep understanding of the subject" as well as have "distinct, stand-out importance" (p.273). Stake (1995) called such a case an "intrinsic case" that can provide insight or understanding for those who are similarly situated. Although Sophie's professional journey and experiences are singular, her reflections and recommendations might prove enlightening to other "similarly situated" TESOL professionals and could possibly inform modifications to preservice preparation and professional development in the field.

Methodological Framework

Personal narratives are particularly important in the field of TESOL because they privilege the voices of the research participants "on a par with those of the researcher" (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 214). Fundamentally, using narratives permits researchers "to uncover how particular configurations of power relations" (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 217) influence how stories are told and how lived experiences are shared as valuable sources of nuanced knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2013). Because narratives are "powerfully shaped by social, cultural, and historical conventions" (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 214), researchers can highlight the unique insights, understanding, and points of view of their participants (Barkhuizen, 2014; Bell, 2002). Connected to CPD, Johnson and Golombek (2002) would argue that teacher learning is "normative and lifelong" and "built through experiences in social contexts" (p. 2). Teachers share and create knowledge, which is evidenced in their narratives of professional reflection, growth, and evolution. The collaboration and mutual respect fostered through the interview and extensive member checking process enabled the researcher and Sophie to co-create the story of her journey as a TESOL professional (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Johnson & Golombek, 2002; Kaiper, 2018; Pavlenko, 2002). This narrative approach felt particularly aligned and appropriate, given the purpose and focus of this study. For George and Selimos (2018), a narrative approach and analysis, especially one that is constructionist in orientation, emphasizes the "meaning-making" and the "reflexive positioning of the researcher" (p. 6). Since Sophie's lived experiences were seen through the lens of the researcher's positionality and professional experiences, his perceptions also became data sources and influenced how her story was ultimately told.

Data Collection

After volunteering to participate in the study, a mutually convenient time to conduct the in-person, semi-structured interview was established with Sophie, and she had the opportunity to review the interview questions in advance (See Appendix 1). The questions clustered around specific themes, including preservice preparation, teaching and administrative experience, support and guidance from superiors, professional development, and lessons learned. The rationale behind the interview questions was to investigate each stage of Sophie's evolution as a TESOL professional and how feelings of efficacy and agency informed her decisions when making changes in her career trajectory. Immediately before the interview was conducted, she provided written informed consent and completed a demographic questionnaire. The interview was audio-recorded to enhance accuracy and completeness.

Data Analysis

The author/lead researcher manually transcribed the audio-recorded interview himself. Once transcribed, Sophie reviewed the interview transcript to make any necessary corrections or edits prior to any analysis of the data occurred. Given their stature and expertise as qualitative researchers, the author/lead researcher used the data analysis techniques suggested by Patton (2015) and Saldaña (2016). Specifically, he hand-coded the interview transcript, using the lenses of the conceptual framework, the purpose of the study, and its research questions. Fundamentally, the analysis unearthed how Sophie evidenced continuous professional development (CPD) by critically reflecting on her practice and incorporating the principles of transformative and transformational learning (Brookfield, 2017; Cranton, 1996; Freire, 2007; Mezirow, 1991) into her professional growth and evolution. After multiple rounds of coding, the nuances of her professional journey and the thought process and reflections underlying her career decisions materialized. The themes that emerged reflect the critical junctures and stages in her evolution as a TESOL professional. During this data analysis process, the author realized that others might benefit from Sophie's reflections regarding her deliberation behind the career choices she made, including any suggestions and recommendations she would offer to others contemplating a similar professional path. Sophie also reviewed the draft of this manuscript and affirmed the findings and discussion, including the lessons learned, as accurate.

Findings

Pathway to TESOL and Graduate Preservice Preparation

After earning her undergraduate degree in English Literature from a private, liberal arts college in the midwestern United States, Sophie lived abroad in Europe. Her only teaching experience while abroad was providing private, one-on-one tutoring lessons in English. Upon returning to the United States, she applied and was accepted to a graduate TESOL program at a public university in a large metropolitan area in the Northeast. She made the conscious decision to wait to begin classroom teaching until she had "learned how to teach first," so she supported herself by "working as a bilingual secretary at a German company." Her recollection of her graduate preservice preparation program was "a lot of reading and theory in the classes," then being thrown into a classroom teaching practicum with "minimal preparation" for actually teaching a class. She recalls that the placement testing for these classes was not rigorous. Other than the proficiency level of the class, "there wasn't a lot of guidance at all." No curriculum was provided, only reference textbooks where lessons or activities could be gleaned. She vaguely remembers being observed "a time or two" and taking a seminar class along with the teaching practicum. What was memorable, however, was the "end-of-term party" and the "eagerness and appreciation" of her adult students, mostly Latinas from Central America. These students gave her a gift of "14-carat gold, little stud earrings shaped like coffee beans" because they hailed from countries where coffee is grown. This lack of guidance and support from superiors, which would become the hallmark of Sophie's professional career, was fortunately counterbalanced by rewarding, affirming, and sustaining relationships with her students. Over time, she developed similar relationships with her teaching and ultimately her administrative peers.

Entering the Field and Experience as an Instructor

Immediately upon graduation, Sophie began teaching in a Saturday adult ESOL program connected to the university she had attended. A guest speaker during her last semester of study suggested that she contact another local university and request to volunteer as a tutor in one of their ESOL programs to "get her foot in the door." After about a month of tutoring in a computer lab for one of their writing classes, an adjunct professor got sick with pneumonia, and Sophie was asked to take over her classes. She ended up teaching in that institution for ten years. After her first term of teaching in this higher education setting, she interviewed for a second teaching position at a pre-academic and professional preparation ESOL program connected to a large university system. Based on her experience in the other institution, she was hired immediately. Over the course of time, enrollment, seniority, and pay rate would dictate Sophie's teaching hours and schedules and decisions about where to work and how many hours to work at each location. Later on, she began working at a third, university-based, ESOL program as a safeguard. By that time, she was a mother of two small daughters. Once her daughters were school age, Sophie was often in five schools per day: the two where her daughters were attending and the three where she was teaching. The reality of

juggling multiple responsibilities that is so common for our adult EBLs (Day et al., 2011) is also true for their instructors. Given the part-time or adjunct nature of most teaching positions in universities and adult ESOL programs in the United States, instructors must work at multiple locations just to cover their living expenses, often without health insurance coverage or other benefits.

In addition to her basic love of teaching and engaging with her adult EBLs, the challenging and exhausting aspects of planning for and teaching classes in multiple locations were ultimately overshadowed by the profoundly rewarding experiences with her students. Over a 30-year career, Sophie has been fortunate to have had many rewarding and affirming experiences with her students, but she identified some of the most memorable. Early in her career, she taught an absolute beginner class whose tremendous work ethic and progress over an eight-week term were noteworthy and incredibly satisfying compared to the slower progress made in higher-level classes that she had taught. Another was inviting the author of a book her class had read to visit the class and share more details of her escape from the Holocaust and immigration to the United States and answer their questions. The students were incredibly enthusiastic and excited because they had never met a published author in person before and presented her with a large bouquet of flowers on her arrival. Finally, the most rewarding experience was when a gifted student from one of her writing classes, who frequently sought out her tutelage and feedback, invited her a year or so later to a production of a play that he had written and dedicated to her.

Transition from Instructor to Administrator

Sophie continued to juggle her work life, with the hopes of maximizing her pay to contribute to the household expenses of her family. Immediately before the start of an upcoming semester, she received a disconcerting telephone call from the institution where she had been teaching for ten years. Via a voicemail message, she was informed by her boss that, due to lack of enrollment and the need to maintain the required teaching load for a full-time faculty member, he could not offer her the class that she was scheduled to teach. Upset and concerned about suddenly losing half her income, she went to the director of another program where she was teaching and offered to substitute teach or do any administrative work available. This request prompted Sophie's foray into administration. The school needed to do a self-study for accreditation purposes, and Sophie was hired as the self-study coordinator. In this case, a crisis yielded unforeseen opportunities and benefits because, in this administrative role, Sophie developed the insights and skills that would prove invaluable when she was opening and seeking accreditation for her own language school. At this time, she continued to teach part time and work as a coordinator part time because she "didn't want to give up teaching."

Approximately a year after being hired as the self-study coordinator, the academic coordinator of the program announced that he was taking a three-month leave of absence. The program's director asked Sophie to fill this temporary vacancy. Sophie agreed if she could continue teaching a writing-intensive class that she had developed. This class enabled students with F-1 visas to remain in-status until their applications were processed and they could matriculate into credit studies at the program's host university. After Sophie agreed, the current academic coordinator/friend pulled her aside and whispered, "I am not coming back." At that moment, she realized that she was not doing his job temporarily but was moving into administration on a more permanent basis. She "wasn't thrilled" about this change in professional direction because her heart was solidly in teaching, but she "was going to be earning a lot more money" and her work schedule was going "to be more stable." This financial security and stability were enticing for a working mother with small children. Sophie characterizes this move as not necessarily choosing administration, but, by chance and necessity, administration being "thrust upon her." Bailey (2006) might characterize her experience of becoming a language teacher supervisor as "almost by accident" (p. xiii).

Transition from Administrator to Opening Her Own School

As mentioned previously, Sophie did not typically receive guidance and support from her superiors throughout her TESOL career. In addition to her own job duties as academic coordinator, she assumed responsibility for administrative tasks that her director failed to do to ensure the smooth operation of the program. This openness, flexibility, and commitment to her instructors and students served her well when she decided to take a leap of faith, become her own change agent, and open her own language school. This decision was sparked when unexpected situations fundamentally changed the program where she had been

working, its position within the institution, and its internal dynamics. By this time, her children were older and more self-sufficient, so she could devote more time and psychic energy to the operation of the school. Even though she opened the school with partners and financial backing, the story of its opening and operation is a case study in Sophie's steadfast resilience. Fundamentally, her experience was Murphy's Law brought to life or what could go wrong did and usually at the most inopportune time. During her tenure, she lost her financial investor due to the Great Recession in 2008 and 2009 and various partners and teachers due to illness and other circumstances. These losses demanded she assume multiple roles to keep the school running, often because she lacked the money to hire someone to help her. Despite the trials and hardships, she is proud of opening a school from scratch, getting it licensed, and securing its operations and services to international students and the surrounding local community for ten years.

The requirements of opening a language school will vary greatly by location. Sophie and her partners first needed to secure a location, repurpose it to function as a school, furnish and equip the classrooms and office spaces, purchase the necessary supplies and textbooks, and then create policy handbooks and curricula. Simultaneously, they needed to incorporate the business and get licensed by the state's Department of Education, the Bureau of Proprietary School Supervision, and the Department of Homeland Security in order to accept international students on F-1 visas.[3] They also needed to begin advertising and marketing the school to attract students. From start to finish, this initial licensing process took approximately 18 months. After this initial licensure, they needed to get accredited within three years to remain open. Given her perseverance and ability to forge collaborative, hard-working teams (Komives & Wagner., 2010; McCarthy, 2017), she not only was accredited on time but, at the time her school was first accredited, hers was the only program in the state to be granted an initial five-year accreditation. Her previous experience in administration, especially as the self-study coordinator, proved invaluable in this endeavor.

As mentioned above, Sophie is skilled at building and sustaining trusting and loyal working relationships, which enabled her to overcome the many obstacles she faced in the creation and operation of her school. The Murphy's Law experiences were often counterbalanced by good people making their way to her and providing assistance at critical junctures. For example, a graduate TESOL student was able to do her required, unpaid internship at Sophie's school and helped her complete the extensive paperwork required for the initial self-study accreditation. When a work partner got sick, a teacher assumed administrative responsibilities on a part-time basis to help her run the school.

Much like her teaching experience, Sophie also had rewarding experiences as an administrator, including as the director of her own school. One of her former students ultimately earned her master's degree in linguistics and became a teacher in the program where she was the academic coordinator and still teaches there to this day. At one point, Sophie was teaching an elective course around using literature in adult ESOL classes in the graduate TESOL program where she herself had graduated. While in the middle of the final accreditation process for her school, Sophie helped one of her instructors prepare to teach this course in her stead. Unfortunately, the class never ran due to insufficient enrollment, but the instructor went on to teach college-level courses in other universities.

Although Sophie lamented selling her school to a businessman and not a fellow educator, there are two "silver linings" regarding the sale. The first was securing ten-year accreditation prior to the sale, which was a huge gift to the new owner and one fewer obstacle toward ensuring the school's continued existence. Though most of the faculty of the school had left, one pivotal staff person remained. The coordinator of registration and information technology, a former student and employee at the program where Sophie worked as the academic coordinator, was hired by her when she first opened the school. He had started an associate degree but never finished, so he learned the business of operating a language school "on the job." Because he speaks the same home language as the new owner (who speaks very little English), he was

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[3] In the state where Sophie opened her language school in the United States, she had to secure licensure from the state Department of Education and the Bureau of Proprietary School Supervision before she could open her school. Likewise, before she could accept students from outside the United States to attend her school on F-1 visas, she needed permission and licensure from the national government, specifically the Department of Homeland Security, the agency that oversees and approves all legal immigration and visas to the United States.

promoted to Director of Operations. This promotion was not based on any formal academic credentials but solely on his linguistic capabilities, historical knowledge of the school's operation, and unwavering commitment to the school and its students. Sometimes, our students take unconventional paths to success, but these opportunities would not have been possible without the bi/multiliteracy that we help them cultivate.

Discussion

In summary, Sophie's journey parallels many in the field, including living abroad and deciding to pursue TESOL as a career; entering graduate preservice preparation; working as an instructor; transitioning into administration; and finally opening her own language school. With the insights gained through these various professional experiences, Sophie has chosen to support the next generation of TESOL professionals by mentoring graduate interns in their teaching practica at her alma mater. In ways, her professional journey has come "full circle" and has landed where she started her career. Given the variety and richness of her journey, the lessons that Sophie has learned and the suggestions she could make might benefit others contemplating their next professional steps, especially ones that mirror her own.

After 30-plus-years in the field of TESOL, what recommendations would Sophie make to others in the field based on her reflections, insights, and experiences? The author supported Sophie's recommendations by citing relevant research literature.

Administrative Lessons Learned

1. Provide preservice teaching preparation that balances theory and pedagogy with practical application and guidance around actually teaching adult EBLs in the classroom (Housel, 2021).
2. Administer your programs and run your language schools with the mindset of an educator, keeping the needs of your students at the forefront of all decisions and supporting your instructors and staff, so they can implement the goals of the program and address the needs of your students effectively (TESOL International Association, Inc., 2003).
3. Strive to create a supportive work environment (Milner, 2002) that unites team members in mutually respectful, collaborative, and inclusive ways (Komives & Wagner, 2010; McCarthy, 2017).
4. Develop teacher leaders who are accountable to one another (Adams et al., 2008) through professional development (PD) (Bergeron, 2008; Milner, 2002; Perry & Hart, 2012), like webinars or reading research articles with follow-up discussions, and peer support (Komives & Wagner, 2010).
5. Schedule regular staff meetings to share administrative updates and provide collegial support (Komives & Wagner, 2010) through "teacher shares" (sharing a successful activity or pedagogical approach with teaching colleagues), a technique also endorsed by Mermelstein (2018).
6. Hire instructors who are passionate about teaching and can engage with their students versus instructors who give "good paper" (i.e., those who are good with administrative tasks but who are uninspiring as educators).
7. Be mindful of employees' skill sets and avoid promotions to their "level of incompetence" (e.g., not all good teachers are good administrators).
8. Encourage instructors to reflect on their teaching (Mermelstein, 2018) and become "reflective in action" (Schön, 1987), by experimenting and being innovative with curriculum, classroom activities, texts, and the use of technology. Innovation in the use of educational technology and platforms has become crucial during COVID-19 school closures and the accompanying dramatic shift to remote/distance teaching and learning.
9. Meet privately with instructors and other supervisees to provide constructive feedback and criticism (McCarthy, 2015) or to discuss and work out any workplace problems or misunderstandings (Hope, 2014).
10. Conduct consistent evaluations of program staff as a supervisor and anonymous evaluations of program staff by adult EBLs (TESOL International Association, Inc., 2003).
11. Promote professional self-reflection and "reflective teaching" (Brookfield, 2017; Farrell, 2012; Mermelstein, 2018; Schön, 1987).

12. Create a welcoming environment for adult EBLs (Birnbaum et al., 2012) by providing culturally and linguistically appropriate orientations before and ongoing supports throughout their tenure in your program (TESOL International Association, Inc., 2003).

13. Have current or former students work or volunteer in your program and act as cultural ambassadors, advisors, and role models for other students to enhance their feelings of connection and belonging to your program (Fuhr et al., 2007; Shiffman, 2019).

14. Provide mentorship, guidance, and support, so instructors can transition into administrative and supervisory posts more seamlessly (Bailey, 2006).

Lessons Learned When Opening a Language School

1. Make sure you are aware of the licensing and accreditation requirements in your local region and country for operating your school and accepting international students.

2. Allow ample time to complete all required paperwork for licensure and accreditation, and have others proofread the documents for consistency, accuracy, and compliance with established standards.

3. Choose a location for your school that is accessible by public transportation and has sufficient parking.

4. Ensure the functionality of the classroom and office spaces and be mindful of accommodations and accessibility for students with disabilities (Dolmage, 2017).

5. Secure consistent financial backing and support and working partners who share your work ethic, commitment, and vision for the school.

6. Encourage "invitational leadership" of program staff and instructors to ensure the smooth operation and growth of the school, including meeting programmatic goals (McKnight & Martin, 2015; TESOL International Association, Inc., 2003).

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

The hope of any single-subject case study is that the singularity and uniqueness of the context and findings will have generalizability and resonance to a larger audience. Of course, this degree of specificity is, in other ways, a limitation. Replicating this study with others who have transitioned from being ESOL instructors to administrators in different parts of the United States and the world is warranted. Will changing the setting, especially from an ESL to an EFL or to a non-Western context, alter the findings or the career paths of the TESOL professionals studied? Similarly, implementing, then investigating, the efficacy of the recommendations made around modifying preservice preparation and continuous professional development merit further evaluation and research.

Conclusion

The foundation for supporting instructors of TESOL to transition into positions of administration and leadership, including opening their own language schools, should begin in their preservice preparation through mandatory or elective coursework and nurtured throughout their professional careers with effective supervision, mentorship, and ongoing PD (Bailey, 2006; Bergeron, 2008; Brannan & Bleistein, 2012; Brookfield, 2017; Cranton, 1996; Faez & Valeo, 2012; Milner, 2002). Either out of choice or necessity, many instructors of adult EBLs must incorporate administrative work into their careers on a full- or part-time basis to earn a living wage and to obtain health insurance or other workplace benefits (e.g., consistent work hours and scheduling). As Sophie has observed, not all effective instructors become good administrators. Each TESOL professional must develop the critical self-reflection (Brookfield, 2017) to assess where their skill sets lie and pursue vocational avenues that most closely align with these strengths and leverage them to shine. If administration is chosen, TESOL professionals must cultivate the supports, internal and external, to transform (Mezirow, 1991) into exemplary, passionate administrators. Like all small business owners, opening and running a language school takes persistence, perseverance, sacrifice, and resilience as well as effective and dedicated partners (financial, administrative, and educational). An understanding, supportive

familial and friendship network is also important. The mantra, "it takes a village[4]," could easily be applied to running an equitable, inclusive, innovative, and profitable language school. As Sophie would attest, keeping the heart and mindset of an educator and maintaining an unwavering commitment to your school's mission and purpose (TESOL International Association, Inc., 2003) is crucial in serving the needs of your students and fostering the necessary professional growth and evolution of your instructors and program staff to keep your school innovative and relevant. Sophie is a beautiful example of the power of networking, an openness to possibilities, and the willingness to take calculated risks that enable TESOL professionals to become the "agents of change" (Cranton, 1996; Freire, 2007) that our field and the students we serve so desperately need and deserve.

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[4] The entire saying, which originates from Africa, is that "it takes a village to raise a child." In this context, the saying implies that many people, working together, are needed to open and operate an equitable, inclusive, innovative, and profitable language school.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

Interviewer: First, I want to learn a bit about your experience teaching adult, English-language learners and administering adult English- to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs.

1) Tell me about your preservice teacher preparation and your experience teaching adult English-language learners.
2) Tell me about your professional path before your current position as a program administrator or supervisor in an adult ESOL program.
3) Tell me about your decision to become a program administrator or supervisor. Tell me more.
4) Tell me about your most rewarding teaching experience, either with an individual student or an entire class.
5) Tell me about a situation with a class or a student you found challenging as a teacher.
a) How did you handle this situation?
6) Tell me about your most rewarding experience overall as a program administrator or supervisor.
7) Tell me about the most challenging situation overall as a program administrator or supervisor.
8) How did you handle this situation?

Interviewer: Now, I would like to address both rewarding and challenging situations you might have experienced in your program.

9) Tell me about the most rewarding experience you have had with a specific teacher, subordinate, or student in your program.
10) Tell me a challenging situation you have experienced with a specific teacher, subordinate, or student in your program.
11) How did you handle this situation?

Interviewer: Now, I would like to learn about the support you have received from your superiors, especially when confronted with challenging situations.

12) Please describe the support that you receive from your supervisors regarding administering, managing, and supervising your program.
13) In your opinion, what do your supervisors do well and where could they improve?
14) What type of professional development activities or support is provided to you as an administrator, manager, or supervisor?

Interviewer: Finally, I would like to discuss the type of professional development and support you offer to your teaching staff.

15) Please describe the support that you provide your instructors and other program staff. How often do you meet with your teaching and other program staff?
16) What type of professional development activities or support do you provide to your teaching staff? Other program staff? How do you decide the content and format of these professional development activities?
17) Are these professional development activities done on-site? If so, who conducts them?
18) Do you, your teachers, and your program staff attend professional conferences? Do you or your staff present at professional conferences?
19) What publications, reports, or policy statements have you or your staff created to share your work with adult English-language learners and with the larger community? How have you used social media and other digital technology to market your programs and to share your work with the larger community?
20) What lessons have you learned during your professional journey and what recommendations would you make to other TESOL professionals?
21) How did your professional evolution and any feelings of professional efficacy and agency impact your career decisions, especially those related to assuming administrative positions and to opening your own language school?
22) Is there anything else you would like to share?