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Empowering Teachers through Professional Development

Walking across the dusty courtyard of a high school in West Africa, you might hear students in an English class droning dictation sentences or see them silently copying down exercises that their teacher has written on the board for that day's lesson. The students are crammed three or four to a desk, and the only light in the classroom comes from three open windows and the doorway. The heat is stifling, preventing productive learning. However, at this particular school, if you continue walking, you might chance upon a different English class. This one has the same environmental constraints as the first class, but here students in groups are deciding how they will divide up tasks to complete the assignment their teacher has given them. The teacher, Nafissa, slowly walks around the classroom, listening in on group discussions, clarifying instructions, and offering guidance by asking questions. The students are eager to present their work. At the end of the lesson, the students share their impressions of what they liked and didn't like about the activities. Nafissa asks each group to collectively write down one positive comment and one suggestion of how to change the activity for a future class. She collects their papers as the students leave the classroom, chatting to one or two who have remained behind.

Nafissa has been a teacher of English at the same high school for more than twenty-one years. There is little to be envied about Nafissa's situation, yet her attitude remains positive, in part because she continually assesses her teaching practices in a variety of ways. What inspires teachers like Nafissa to continue to improve their teaching? What does she do that other teachers could try? Why is it important to think about how you teach? This article will highlight some reasons for teachers to pursue professional development. I will also suggest techniques that teachers like Nafissa have found help them feel empowered and motivated in their English language classrooms. It is worth noting that all of the activities described are low-cost options.

Why professional development?

One of the main reasons to pursue professional development is to be empowered—to have the opportunity and the confidence to act upon your ideas as well as to influence the way you perform in your profession. Empowerment is the process through which teachers become capable of engaging in, sharing control of, and influencing events and institutions that affect their lives. As teachers, we have the capacity to empower ourselves if we keep in mind the following precepts:

- Be positive.
- Believe in what you are doing and in yourself.
- Be proactive, not reactive.
- Be assertive, not aggressive.

Feeling empowered can also manifest leadership skills, and teacher empowerment leads to improvement in student performance and attitude.

To be an effective teacher requires a combination of professional knowledge and specialized skills as well as your own personal experiences and qualities. And adding to their knowledge base and acquiring new skills are among the main reasons teachers participate in professional development activities (Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan 2001). For both a novice teacher and a veteran like Nafissa, learning about new ideas and techniques in English language teaching can be motivating and encouraging.

Many English language teaching experts believe that ongoing professional development is essential, especially in today's world of constantly changing technology. Teachers of English who have been trained to use new techniques and resources are more inclined to try them with their students (Chisman and Crandall 2007).

Teachers all around the world face similar challenges due to the very nature of school environments. They teach their classes independently from their colleagues, which makes them feel isolated. Sometimes teachers, especially those who are new to the field, can become overwhelmed by the demands of school bureaucracy, and if teachers do not receive regular supervision or feedback, they can become frustrated. Professional development activities can alleviate some of these issues. Such activities can also bring together teachers who have similar experiences and interests. Just having the opportunity to share experiences and ideas with colleagues can help a teacher gain a sense of community and belonging.

Find professional development activities that suit you

Teacher development opportunities can take many forms. Some are individual or informal while other occasions are collective or structured. The most obvious professional development activity for an English teacher is reading journal articles about teaching English; reading journals (and maybe even writing an article for one) keeps you informed about new trends and research developments. However, in this article, I will focus on activities that are active and interactive and that often involve reflective teaching.

How can you decide which activity (or activities) best suits your needs and interests? What you need or want as a novice teacher may be completely different from what you might pursue after five years of teaching or after a decade or more in the classroom. Many of the suggestions in this article have been around for quite some time, but this article includes information about how some teachers actually put these ideas into practice; such information might help you decide which strategy or method best suits you and your teaching situation.

Reflective teaching

A myriad of definitions exists for reflective teaching; some describe individual practices while others explain what a group of like-minded teachers could do. Many researchers believe that teachers can learn a great deal about the reasons behind their teaching philosophies and practices by examining their experiences and asking and answering questions about them (see Richards and Farrell 2005; Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan 2001; Zeichner and Liston 1996). No approach to reflective teaching is superior to another; in fact, language teachers can learn strategies from other academic disciplines. I see reflective practice as a fundamental part of continuing professional development; it provides me with opportunities to analyze and ask questions about my objectives as well as to examine how I plan and what I teach.

Zeichner and Liston (1996) include the following key characteristics in describing a teacher who engages in reflective teaching practices as someone who

- is able to identify, analyze, and attempt to solve problems that occur in the classroom;
- is conscious of and questions his or her beliefs about language teaching;
- is cognizant of the institutional and cultural contexts in which he or she teaches;
- is responsible for his or her own professional development.

On an individual level, reflection can help a teacher develop a greater awareness of his or her own teaching as well as a better understanding of student learning. Farrell (1998) states that reflective teaching helps free teachers from impulsive behavior or, on the other extreme, from monotony in their teaching; it also allows teachers to develop their own educational perspectives.

Teachers can also benefit from sharing their reflective teaching experiences with their colleagues; some methods of sharing are informal while others tend to follow a specific framework. One way to take control of one's own learning is through cooperation with other teachers. Collegial cooperation can help teachers become more assertive and decisive about their personal learning; it can also boost their confidence and empower them to find solutions to challenges they face in their teaching.

When teachers collaborate in reflective teaching practices, it is important to keep in mind that the most beneficial and effective approaches are the ones that give all the participants, you and your partner(s), the chance to assess your teaching in a nonjudgmental and supportive manner. Probably the most difficult aspect of collegial collaboration is making a commitment to the method you decide to put into practice. Finding time in a busy teaching schedule is challenging, but such an experience can lead to added self-confidence and new inspiration in how you approach language teaching.

Let's take a look at some activities and techniques that you can try out on your own and then perhaps use with colleagues and the English language teaching community at large.

Individual technique: Keep a teaching journal

Writing down observations and thoughts about your teaching is one way to gain insight about the how's and why's behind your teaching style as well as a means to document what goes on in your classroom. By keeping a journal, teachers can examine the details that indicate why a particular lesson was successful or why one was not. How likely are you to accurately remember the subtleties of what happened during a lesson a month, or even a week, later? The process of describing events, asking questions, and formulating hypotheses can reveal aspects of language teaching that further a teacher's own professional development (Bailey, Curtis, and Nunan 2001).

There are many ways to keep a teaching journal. Some teachers consider the process of writing a journal to be informal and personal, a kind of private, professional diary. You might write about classroom activities, student-teacher interactions, and your feelings about a particular lesson—how successful it was, what factors affected the lesson's success (or lack thereof), what you might do the next time you teach that lesson, how students' reaction to the lesson might influence how you proceed in the next class, and so on.

It is important to identify a particular goal, or goals, to write about in your teaching journal. Getting in the habit of writing about your teaching may take time. In the beginning, it may be difficult to write freely (without editing yourself), but give yourself time to get used to keeping a teaching journal. With a little bit of patience, as well as the determination to write in your journal on a regular basis, you will begin to see patterns not only in your journal entries but also in your teaching. Writing down questions and ideas to think about later can help you direct your focus on the goal you wish to achieve.

Nafissa has been keeping a teaching journal for over six years. At first it was difficult for her to figure out what she wanted to learn about herself and her teaching until she remembered to start out with a simple objective. She decided to concentrate on how she interacted with one particular group of students and how they interacted amongst themselves over a two-month period. Nafissa found that she did not have time to make

entries immediately when the class ended, so she began jotting down a few key words and phrases in a small notebook (used only for journaling), which she then used as a starting point. She expanded these notes into a brief narrative and usually ended each summary with a question (e.g., "How can I reduce my teacher talk time?") or a suggestion for herself (e.g., "Remind students to review and use our rules for negotiating").

By the end of the two months, Nafissa was surprised to realize how much insight she gained from her journal entries. She discovered procedural patterns in the way she managed student group work. She noticed that she did not always check to see whether students understood instructions before they began a class assignment; she corrected this oversight once she realized how much more productive and creative her students were when she gave directions both orally and in written form. What impressed her the most was how the journal writing process helped her reconsider classroom interactions, which led her to change her techniques to some extent, not only with the selected class but with others as well.

Nafissa continued to write about her selected class until the end of the term. Her entries provided her with new questions that she wanted to concentrate on. The following semester she kept notes about one of the questions—"How can I manage group work activities more effectively?"—but with a different group of students. Through journal writing, Nafissa became more aware of her teaching style and was able to interpret her actions in a more meaningful and constructive manner.

Collaborative technique: Share journals

The usefulness of keeping a journal increases when a teacher shares journal entries with a colleague or group of colleagues. This technique allows teachers to compare their experiences and to comment on solutions to problems and point out successful parts of a lesson that they might try with their own classes. In responding to journal entries, teachers can ask each other questions and offer suggestions.

When writing responses to someone else's journal entries, colleagues must keep in mind what the group objective is—why are we writing collaborative journals? How teachers respond can vary; possibilities include offering encouragement, commenting on classroom management issues, giving specific answers to queries, or asking questions to help the writer stay on task. Collaborative journals can also be an effective tool to help novice teachers gain insight from their more experienced colleagues, removing some of the anxiety or trepidation that the new teachers might feel.

While conducting weeklong seminars for Senegalese English teachers, my fellow trainers and I introduced the concept of collaborative journals. For a group of part-time teachers, we explained the concept and the procedure; then we asked the teachers to write down their thoughts about an idea or activity from the day's sessions that they might try with their own classes. We collected the journals and wrote comments that consisted mostly of words of encouragement and helpful questions. Occasionally we would elaborate on how an activity mentioned in a journal could be adapted to a Senegalese context. We repeated the process each day, modeling how this technique could be used with like-minded and motivated colleagues and how it could be an effective tool for teachers to use to build up their students' writing abilities and levels of confidence in a supportive way.

While working with teacher trainers who were already familiar with the notion of collaborative journals, we asked the group to comment in their notebooks on how they could put into practice one aspect of the training. We then collected the journals and redistributed them so that one of the other teacher trainers would respond to that day's entry. The participants found the collaborative journal exchange to be an enlightening experience because it gave them the chance to find out what their colleagues were learning from the sessions and to make comments in a supportive way.

Individual technique: Analyze a critical incident

One effective means of reflective inquiry is to analyze an unexpected event that happens during a class. Such analysis usually involves the teacher writing down a description of what occurred and then considering why

it happened and how it might affect future learning and teaching interactions. A critical incident can refer to a positive or negative classroom event, but what makes it "critical" is how that particular incident caused you to pause, think about it, and review how it relates to your beliefs and perceptions about teaching (Richards and Farrell 2005). This type of analysis can help you decide how to modify your teaching style or behavior, which can improve your teaching performance in similar situations in the future. The examination of a critical incident can be done individually or collectively, and often the analysis is a component of journal writing or discussion groups.

Let me share an experience I had as a teacher trainer that led me to step back and analyze a situation in my classroom. I was conducting my first workshop in a two-week training course with forty Burmese teachers of English in Mandalay and had decided to have the teachers work in small groups. I randomly divided the teachers into groups of four or five to complete a task related to my presentation on teaching oral skills. I instructed the groups to each create a mini-lesson to present to the rest of the teachers, who would then critique it and offer constructive criticism. I thought that everyone understood the objectives of the activity and what my expectations were, so I was perplexed when most of the groups basically copied the model lesson plan without considering how they might adapt it to use in their own classes. When I asked one of the groups why they had completed the task in such a way, a teacher replied, "Well, what you presented works best. We could not improve on it."

That evening as I made notes for the next day's lesson, I decided to write out a description of what had occurred and to try to answer the following questions objectively:

1) What happened before the teachers began the assignment? How did I present the assignment?
2) What were the results?
3) What factors may have contributed to the outcome?
4) What was my reaction at the time of the incident?
5) After reviewing the incident, how might I change how I presented the information as well as my reaction?

By writing down my impressions, I realized that I had not considered the teachers' cultural imperative to not criticize the expert (me) and the importance of polite agreement in this context. I also recognized that I had not thoroughly prepared the teachers to complete the task I had given them.

I decided to begin the next session by encouraging the teachers to share their experiences and to view each other as resources. I also provided the teachers with a template and a list of possible topics and scenarios for the activity; this allowed them to be more invested in the activity. Once the teachers understood that I valued their perspective and cultural sensitivity and that I wanted them to use these resources to modify the model lesson, they enthusiastically began discussing what changes they might make. Through analyzing what had happened that first day, I was able to modify the sessions that followed; that proved to be beneficial not only to the teachers but to me as well.

Collaborative techniques: Try peer mentoring and coaching

Peer mentoring and peer coaching are two techniques that are useful for teachers who have not spent much time (in the English language classroom) on the "other side of the desk." But these techniques can also motivate experienced teachers to reflect on and refine their own teaching strategies and practices. Both methods should be seen as collaborative endeavors that improve a particular aspect of teaching. They also can be used to introduce a new policy or procedure and to explain how to implement it within a given classroom context.

In peer mentoring, a novice teacher is generally paired with an experienced one. The goals behind peer mentoring include giving new instructors individualized attention and encouragement and, at the same time, strengthening their teaching skills (Yanoshak 2007). Although one of the participants usually is more skilled and knowledgeable than the other, mentoring is not meant to be used to critique or evaluate; instead, it provides an opportunity to focus on individual teachers, provide support, share knowledge and experience, and answer questions.

Chisman and Crandall (2007) describe how peer mentoring was implemented in an

English as a Second Language (ESL) program at Yakima Valley Community College in Washington State. The ESL program at Yakima uses a learner-generated thematic curriculum with no core textbooks. According to Chisman and Crandall (35), "Yakima's approach is specifically targeted to serve the special needs of the immigrant population in its service area, predominantly Mexican immigrants working in agricultural and related industries. Most of these immigrants have very low levels of English proficiency and only a few years of formal education." One can imagine how anxious new instructors might feel when they start to teach in the program. To alleviate some of their uneasiness, the Yakima administrative team provides new teachers with an orientation in which they learn about the rationale of the program and have the opportunity to learn from mentors. The mentors meet with their new colleagues, invite them to observe the mentors' classes, and afterwards discuss what went on in the classrooms. A mentor and novice can also use email exchange and set up times to meet when both are not teaching. Although the Yakima approach to peer mentoring is time-consuming (especially for the mentors), it enables new instructors to see firsthand how students communicate their needs and to learn how to develop lessons that reflect those needs. Participating in peer mentoring empowers new teachers to do well in challenging teaching situations. The mentoring process also benefits the mentors because the questions and comments from their partners aid mentors in reflecting on, and possibly improving, their own teaching practices.

Peer coaching is somewhat different from peer mentoring in that the participating teachers see themselves as equals. Together they select an area of teaching or a classroom-related problem they would like to focus on. Coaching has proven to be an effective means of increasing collegiality as well as refining teaching skills (Galbraith and Anstrom 1995). In setting up a peer coaching situation, it is important to choose a colleague whom you respect and trust. Think of the "coach" as the partner who can offer constructive criticism in a nonjudgmental way; you and your partner may decide to take turns acting as the coach, depending on the task at hand. If, for example, you are both teaching the same level of a language class, you can observe each other and discuss approaches or materials and how you might revise them to improve the class.

My first experience with peer coaching occurred in Slovakia when a colleague and I were assigned to redesign and combine the listening course I taught and the speaking course that Jela had been teaching for several semesters. We met to discuss how best to integrate the materials, selecting activities that already reflected both skills and deciding which ones we could revise or omit. We divided up the lessons that needed revision and developed preliminary drafts for each. We then decided to try out the new materials with our students; one of us would teach the module while the other observed the class and took notes. Afterwards, we discussed what had worked and what we might consider changing. Jela and I found the peer coaching experience to be both professionally and personally rewarding, and the head of the department was pleased with the final product.

Collaborative technique: Form a teacher support group

One type of teacher support group is a study group, also known as a study circle. A study group is a group of teachers who meet regularly to discuss a particular aspect or issue related to their teaching. The number of participants can range from three to fifteen. The meetings are structured and have an agenda to follow, and each teacher takes a turn as the facilitator of a meeting. However, the meetings are informal and collegial, with everyone participating in the dialogue. Such meetings are not the same as workshops; no one teacher is "the expert," and the goal is to learn together about a specific aspect of their teaching strategies and practices. Between meetings, the group reads materials related to the issue to be discussed at the next session. A study group can also be conducted online if that is more convenient and the technology is available.

Last year a group of eight English teachers from Lycée Valdiodio Ndiaye in Kaolack, Senegal, worked with a visiting American scholar to form a study group to find out what their students perceived to be their needs and goals in learning English. The group first met

to discuss what they wanted to focus on and agreed on the format that they would use to conduct the meetings. The teachers agreed to meet once a week for six months and chose a time that best suited their busy schedules. The group then designed a short questionnaire (in French), and each teacher had two classes of students complete the forms. Together the teachers reviewed the results, which showed that the majority of students planned to go to a university or training institute after high school. Most of the students surveyed also believed that they would need English, no matter what their plans were for the future. This finding led the study group to focus on how the teachers could bring the real world into the classroom and how they could prepare their students to become independent, self-directed learners of English. During their meetings, the teachers discussed how they could design lesson plans that integrated skills and were relevant to their students' interests. Teachers shared lesson plans with the rest of the group, and together they revised and improved the plans.

Most of the teachers who participated in this study group found the experience to be a positive one. They especially liked learning from and interacting with one another; they realized the strong correlation between the group's discussions and practical classroom applications, and they valued having a nonthreatening environment for collaboration. The group plans to continue meeting regularly, inviting other English teaching colleagues to join them.

Collaborative technique: Join a teacher support network

Support networks are similar to teacher support groups yet differ in that they usually include teachers from several schools in the same community or region. Some support networks rotate schools where meetings are held while others meet at a neutral venue that is not affiliated with any specific school. How a support network operates depends on the goals of the group, but fundamental basics such as membership, size, organization, meeting time, and venue should also be considered (Richards and Farrell 2005).

Sometimes it is beneficial to begin a support network at a grassroots level. In Nouakchott, Mauritania, a motivated group of about forty teachers of English from both the private and public sectors decided to meet informally on a monthly basis to share ideas and experiences. I have included this particular group under teacher support networks (instead of teachers' associations) because the teachers decided that they first wished to identify English teachers who were interested in attending meetings regularly before attempting to register the group as an official association. The group posted this description on its website:

> META, the Mauritania English Teacher Association, is a professional network for teachers of English in Mauritania. The association is open to all teachers of English and welcomes everyone, including private tutors, public school teachers, higher education professors, ministerial inspectors, and instructors from private centers. META functions as an organization to facilitate communication and contact between English teachers throughout Mauritania by holding monthly meetings, sharing methodology and publications, hosting conferences, and communicating via website and email. (http://sites.google.com/site/metankc)

META meetings follow the same format each month: announcements, updating of the contact list, selection of next month's volunteers, ice breaker, teaching point, and distribution of miscellaneous materials. The feedback from the meetings has been overwhelmingly positive; for many of the teachers, this is their only chance to feel connected to their English teaching colleagues and to have an opportunity to improve their own English skills and teaching practices.

Collaborative technique: Form or join local and national teachers' associations

Joining an official teachers' association is another means of pursuing professional development. Often such associations began as support networks whose active members decided to give their group an organizational framework. ATES, the Association for Teachers of English in Senegal, was created in the 1970s and gained official recognition in 1981 when it elected a national board, adopted bylaws, and registered the association with Senegalese authorities. Currently ATES has

between 500 and 600 members, of whom 350 are active. As stated on its website (http://ates.education.sn), the main objective of the association has been to offer English language teachers "an alternative developmental framework through exchanges, organization of professional events, and a profound sense of belonging and worldwide collaboration through affiliation to other international professional organizations." ATES members have gained recognition and support at both national and international levels by developing professional relationships with several organizations. ATES has been a TESOL affiliate since 1999, and in 2003 ATES formed a partnership with the Washington [D.C.] Area TESOL Association (WATESOL). That partnership is still thriving. The two organizations have co-presented several times at the annual international TESOL conventions. Representatives from ATES have participated in WATESOL conferences, and WATESOL members have participated in ATES events.

Collaborative technique: Urge your association to connect with other associations

Sharing ideas and experiences with other teachers in the same geographical region can be mutually beneficial. First, members of established teacher organizations can offer invaluable advice to colleagues in neighboring countries who want to establish a similar organization. Members of the established organization can provide valuable information about what steps lead to the formation of a successful association as well what obstacles exist and how to overcome them; the "newcomers" can decide which tactics might work best for their group in their particular context. Their experienced neighbors can also gain from this kind of dialogue; recounting the evolution of their association could lead to reflective inquiry, resulting in reassessment as well as opportunities for discussion and improvement.

Recently ATES received a request for advice from a group of Rwandan teachers of English who were interested in creating a national teachers' association. The ATES board met and offered realistic suggestions to their Rwandan counterparts (see Appendix). What impressed me the most was how ATES encouraged the Rwandan group to start small and to create an all-inclusive environment by inviting both experienced and new teachers to participate in their activities. Through an email exchange, the Rwandan English teachers expressed their appreciation for the recommendations the ATES board gave them.

The Rwandan teachers shared with ATES the preliminary measures they took to create ATER, the Association of Teachers of English in Rwanda, which included finalizing a concept document, discussing that document with officials at the Ministry of Education, creating a website and an association email address, conducting workshops at different institutions to invite fellow teachers to join the group, and drafting an action plan to prioritize activities for the association. The teachers in Senegal and the teachers in Rwanda all hope to continue to build upon this email exchange, sharing their ideas and cultivating professional relationships on the African continent.

Collaborative technique: Become active in an international professional association

Joining an international professional association is another way to connect with colleagues and pursue personal goals for professional development. The benefits to becoming a member of an international organization include receiving regular newsletters, being a part of interest groups that focus on teaching topics and issues that concern you, and having the opportunity to share and learn from other like-minded individuals.

Two well-known and highly respected international associations are Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL) and the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL). Both organizations promote professional development by hosting conferences and workshops as well as encouraging networking—exchanging ideas and making contacts—through online discussions and correspondence. TESOL and IATEFL offer members discounted prices for convention registrations, online education programs and courses, and their publications. In addition, members are eligible to apply for awards and grants to support their continuing educa-

tion. TESOL and IATEFL also offer global memberships, discounted fees for teachers who work and live in developing countries (TESOL) or in countries that do not have professional teachers' associations (IATEFL). Go to their respective websites—www.tesol.org and www.iatefl.org—to learn more.

Collaborative techniques: Participate in workshops and conferences

One professional development activity that most teachers have experienced during their teaching careers is participation in a workshop. You may have done this while training to become a teacher of English, or perhaps your school administrator or the regional inspector for English teachers organized a seminar on a topic of interest. At workshops the presenter is typically someone knowledgeable about the subject being addressed; you yourself might have led a workshop.

The purpose of a workshop is to provide teachers with the opportunity to learn more about a specific area or skill related to teaching and learning (in this case, English language) within a set amount of time. Workshops are designed to give participants a chance to try out practical applications about the topic being presented and to contemplate how they might utilize or adapt elements of the activity for use in their own classrooms (Richards and Farrell 2005). I have both presented at and participated in successful and unsuccessful workshops; the ones that were successful were carefully planned and were about a topic that was relevant and interesting to the attendees. Effective workshops are ones that highlight a particular teaching point or strategy and make it relevant to the context of the participants.

Participating in conferences is an excellent way for teachers to gain confidence and demonstrate their expertise. For teachers who have never presented at a conference, probably the best advice is to start small and attend a local conference that focuses on short presentations on successful practices in the classroom; several teachers can present an activity that has been effective with their students. After gaining experience at a local conference, teachers may feel empowered to go on to a larger conference. The first time at a large conference, you might want to present together with colleagues from your study group or support network. Or you could present a poster session that spotlights an activity or aspect of teaching that would be of interest to other teachers of English.

Participating in conferences benefits teachers because it motivates them to try new techniques or find solutions to recurring problems in the classroom. Conferences can provide teachers with information and strategies to create new policies or make changes in curriculum. Conference participation also enables teachers to develop long-lasting professional and personal contacts in the English teaching community. Lastly, participating in a conference can empower teachers to be leaders. When they return from a conference, they can teach their colleagues what they learned there and lead those colleagues to adopt new and helpful teaching practices.

Conclusion

Professional development is an ongoing process, one that evolves as you assess and reexamine your teaching beliefs and practices. Some of the approaches described in this article can be pursued individually while others prove to be more beneficial if done collectively. Some activities can be done informally (journals, study groups, etc.) and some follow more traditional formats (e.g., workshops, conferences).

There is no recipe for professional development that works for everyone; something you find to be an effective tool for reflective inquiry may not offer similar results for a colleague. Techniques that you use today may not meet your needs a year from now. But what is paramount is that you discover the many options you have for directing your own learning about teaching. Find something that motivates you to pursue professional development. Many of us discover that by collaborating with other like-minded teachers, we empower ourselves in our individual teaching practices. Effective professional development is self-empowerment. Deciding to take the first step is your responsibility, and that step is well worth taking.

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Appendix 1 Suggestions for Creating a National Association

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Note: These suggestions were compiled by the Association of Teachers of English in Senegal (ATES). However, they can apply to any situation.

- Start small
- Set objectives that can be reached
- Create an email address for the association
- Reach out to new colleagues—get them involved!
- Find resource persons, such as senior or retired professionals or, simply, English language lovers
- Set up regional branches so all colleagues feel they belong
- Encourage the elaboration of action plans at the regional level
- Suggest that regional branches take the action plan of the national association into account when planning for regional activities
- Make all activities visible by issuing a newsletter
- Make your association known to your Ministry of Education
- Print and sell membership cards to raise funds for the association
- Find partnerships
- Make professional development your main objective so that teachers know they get something from the association
- Involve students as much as possible through their schools' English clubs; later on you can plan regional and national English club contests to help students develop their English skills
- Encourage social gatherings so that bonds go beyond professional relationships
- Promote English