

PPE1B –Spring 2009

Markéta Ševčíková

Professional development

What to imagine behind the headline phrase? Generally, when one develops, they go further, or rather, they get better. Consequently, to be successful in improving oneself, one definitely has to learn – be it in theory or in practice. Analogously, to grow in the profession of a teacher of English requires learning the theory and practice of both the language and language teaching. In his book on ELT methodology called *Learning teaching*, Jim Scrivener suggests several ideas that aim to advise teachers on how to make their development effective.

Before I will try to summarize Scrivener's suggestions and briefly comment on them from the perspective of Czech environment, let me remind you of few basic facts that a teacher should not forget about. Firstly, teaching is a profession that requires continuous, life-long learning, which is much easier when one stays open. Doubtless, there is always "the possibility of being wrong" or of finding "more interesting alternative ways of doing things,...changing some of your ideas" (370). Therefore it seems more than advisable to "keep your mind working on discovering what you believe about how people learn and how best to enable that" (370). Once you, as a teacher, have become to understand that you do not want to find yourself fossilized one day, once you have internalized the need for further growth, you have made the best thing to start with.

The first suggestion put by Scrivener concerns formal, or rather institutional upbringing of teachers. His observation that „training courses [are] where your development as a teacher really begins“ is, doubtless, valid for Czech republic, where one is entitled to perform the profession legally only after the completion of master's study program in English language and methodology, too (371). Nevertheless, within the state educational policy, there is a two-level participation in the upbringing of future, not only but also English, teachers established; teacher-aimed education is provided by both the secondary and the tertiary sphere. It follows that state educational programs are the fundamentals of teacher training in Czech Republic. Any other training, which is run by private institutions, should rather serve to widen the knowledge of an already certificated, "ready-made" teacher. But still, such further development is enhanced by Czech government and European Union too, as they furnish grants for the extra training courses. This, fortunately, implies the state's initiative to support

education and, hence, future. Under such fruitful conditions, where there are no real physical or social obstructions, learning teaching becomes a matter of personal enthusiasm, interest and motivation purely.

As I have already implied, learning teaching should not stop with getting a degree or leaving an institution. It is in favor of both a teacher and her/his students when s/he keeps acquiring both knowledge and experience on her/his own. Scrivener comes with, basically, three points that can be helpful in these efforts.

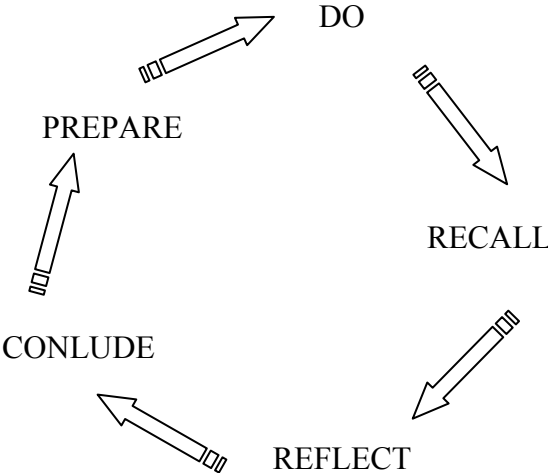
The first can be labeled Teacher development (TD) groups and associations. Scrivener finds the essential advantage of these in that they enable teachers to meet and simply share their experience, their “stories” (372). TD groups exist in Czech Republic and the international ones are approachable via Internet at least. However, the Czech ones are certainly not to be found in every town or village where teachers teach. Therefore, we are encouraged, or rather recommended to start such local groups on our own. Scrivener advises that “although it may be tempting to programme talks, events, etc.” it is really most beneficial to simply exchange experience in the group (372). And this part of the job can, in fact, be done even between just two teachers, ten minutes a day or one hour a week. Though, of course, the more people are involved in the exchange, the more ideas are likely to be carried out.

Next point made by Scrivener is that “observation, done well, provides perhaps the most useful help a learning teacher can get” (374). What is sure, it needs a lot of courage to expose oneself to this more or less embarrassing situation; but outcomes are worth of it. Who can reflect on the methods of teaching you use and who can recognize the possible mistakes in them better than another specialist in the same subject? This way, you can not only learn about yourself but also you can be advised on how to improve. The only two requirements that this kind of learning teaching seems to make are, first, to put aside your shyness and, second, to have cooperative colleagues.

Then there is the last basic Scriveners proposal and that is to study your own teaching. For this purpose, you can certainly use the feedback you have received from your colleagues’ observation. In this case, it is only up to you how you will reflect on it, what direction you will take further and what action you will decide to take so as to diminish the little discrepancies in your working practice. Another grounds for self-reflection may be created by recording your teaching, or making an action research.

It is out of considerations, that professional development goes hand in hand with a personal development and involves an active, enthusiastic approach to one’s work, ability to accept constructive criticism, to admit to one’s own mistakes and to learn from them while working out your teaching. To summarize, “learning teaching is an aware and active use of the experiential learning cycle [fig. 1] in one’s own life and work” (376).

Figure 1



Reference:

Scrivener, Jim. *Learning teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan, 1994.