



## TESOL Board Connect: DIY TESOL Professional Development

by [Tamara Jones](#)

“If you ever feel like you have learned all there is about good teaching, it’s time to get out of the profession.” This mantra was often repeated by a former supervisor, and it’s stuck with me over my 25+ years of working in the TESOL field. There are so many reasons why English language teaching (ELT) professionals should participate in ongoing professional development (PD), many of which appear in the pages of this very edition of *TESOL Connections*. Not only does much of my PD benefit my students (Gore et al., 2017), but it also frequently leaves me feeling reinvigorated and excited about my job.

I’ve been fortunate throughout my career to teach at schools in which PD is valued and to have the ability to attend local and international TESOL conventions. However, that is not the reality for all TESOL members. If your current teaching context isn’t able to fully support your professional growth goals, there are some additional things teachers can do themselves.

### 1. Organize “Brown Bag Sessions” With Colleagues

The Teagle Working Group on the Teacher-Scholar (2007) found that “regular interchanges with professional colleagues allow teacher-scholars to continue to learn and test their knowledge, rather than allow their ideas to become locked into patterns learned in graduate school or perhaps too neatly packaged by the demands of pedagogy.” Teaching can sometimes feel isolating, and it’s extremely beneficial to meet with coworkers, either in person or virtually, and share ideas and resources, troubleshoot problems, and pat each other on the back.

### 2. Join a TESOL Interest Section

I recently attended a TESOL Newcomers session and met a teacher in Brazil who said she was really struggling to reach her students who can’t come to school because of the pandemic but don’t have reliable internet access. Even though they are on a different continent, some of the K–12 English language teachers in my MATESOL class here in Baltimore have reported similar concerns. It reminded me that teachers all over the world are facing the same problems.

So, I suggested that she join the TESOL [Pre-K–12 Interest Section](#) and post a question in the discussion board asking other teachers what they are doing to reach their students who can’t

attend class online. [TESOL interest sections](#) are such a fabulous support and resource, and the interest section leaders are eager to facilitate communication among their members.

### 3. Host a Study Group

Whenever I come across an interesting research paper, I download it and save it to a file on my computer. But, my job is administrative and classroom focused, so can you imagine how often I actually carve out time to sit down and read the articles? Not very often, I'm sad to report.

To remedy this, our program created an annual Study Group, where we pick a topic of interest (e.g., pragmatics, bottom-up listening, assessment, repetition). We find academic journal articles and research papers on the theme and we conduct a kind of TESOL book club in which we all read the same articles and discuss how they might impact our teaching. In this way, "research into language learning and language teaching has provided us with insights that our intuitions might not have led" (Paran, 2017). This kind of PD can be easily replicated by anyone with a group of enthusiastic, like-minded colleagues.

### 4. Watch a Webinar

I'm a long-time member of several TESOL interest sections, and the number of interesting and relevant webinars they have offered over recent years has been truly impressive. Even when I can't attend a webinar in real time because of a scheduling conflict, they are recorded and I can watch them later.

As well, the rest of the internet is absolutely jam-packed with great ELT videos and webinars. I particularly like the presentation videos provided by [The New School](#), where you can see all your TESOL heroes, from Judy Gilbert talking about teaching pronunciation to Randi Reppen talking about using Corpora to Scott Thonbury talking about teaching grammar. Similarly, International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) has made presentation videos [available on YouTube](#). There are just so many wonderful ELT resources out there!

### 5. Observe a Colleague

One of the great things about being largely virtual over the past year is that we can observe other teachers in action from the comfort of our living room sofas. I have always benefitted from sitting in on a colleague's lesson; I can see how different approaches play out in the classroom, and I can learn more about teaching subjects that are less familiar to me. Especially during the pandemic, it has been extremely beneficial to my own teaching practice to see how my coworkers help students with tech challenges and use technology to facilitate instruction and practice in Zoom sessions.

Sometimes, teachers are nervous to have other teachers watch them; however, "rather than viewing peer observation as an evaluative procedure, teachers should see themselves as co-researchers collaborating for each others' benefit" (Richards & Lockhart, 1991). In this way, observing fellow teachers can be really helpful.

## 6. Write an Article or Submit a Proposal

Sometimes there is a topic that I am interested in and familiar with, but don't know as much about as I'd like. For example, I have long struggled with controlling my teacher talk time (TTT), and I wanted to learn more about differentiating between helpful TTT and distracting TTT, as well as gather tips for limiting the distracting aspects of TTT in my lessons. So, I submitted a proposal to a local PD series and, when it was accepted, I got to work reading and creating a research-based presentation.

Presenting at [local conferences](#) or writing an article for a [TESOL affiliate](#) or [interest section newsletter](#) can be a great way to “force” myself to actually follow through on my PD goals. It takes courage and a lot of strict time management on my part to ensure I can deliver on my proposal, but I've learned a lot about different aspects of teaching by leaning into interesting topics.

While it's great when our workplaces make PD a priority for teachers, not all of us are in the luxurious position of having PD brought to our own door steps. Sometimes, we have to create our own PD opportunities. I hope this list has given you a few ideas for how you can achieve your own professional growth goals without a lot of external support.

### References

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*Tamara Jones has taught in Russia, Korea, England, and Belgium. She is currently the associate director of the English Language Center at Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland, USA. Tamara holds a PhD in education from the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom.*