



6 Tips for Successful Continuous Professional Development

by [Jaber Kamali](#)

Training and *development* seem to be the two most intertwined terms in the field of teacher education. [Baecher](#) (2021) argues that professional development is a more relevant concept in teacher education than training for a number of reasons, but in part because training ends while professional development continues and is concerned with goals, learning, and the future. We have all seen teachers, all over the world, who passionately attend preservice courses but are left unsupported afterward. These teachers are not ready enough to face all the difficulties during their teaching career and, therefore, give it up. *Teacher burnout*, a widespread phenomenon among all teachers, is rooted in this process.

As the name of professional development suggests, it is a continuous practice that never ends; if it does, the teacher ends their own professional path by being demotivated, disappointed, dismantled, and unwanted. To avoid this, continuous professional development is a must. This article suggests six tips for successful continuous professional development in English language teaching (ELT).

1. Always Be a Learner

Teachers who forget about their learning history cannot understand their learners' wants, needs, and rights. Being in someone else's shoes is one of the most practical ways of empathizing with them. So, taking up a new hobby, such as a new language, musical instrument, or sport can act as ways of engaging ourselves with the learning environment. This can help us as teachers to see the world from a learner's lens and remind us of the challenges our learners go through. For example, actually encountering negative feedback from the teacher of a new class we take can have a more tangible impact than reading a lot of books about how detrimental such feedback can be.

2. Be Positive and Surround Yourself With Positive People

In all professions, one of the reasons for disappointment, lack of progress, and burnout is being surrounded by negative people; teaching is no exception. We have all seen people who see the glass as half empty and are a source of discouragement. Avoid these people because they do not let you flourish, and also remember not to be a source of discouragement for anyone else.

Foord (2009), in condemnation of the negative teachers who incessantly complain about their institutions, classes, and relationships, calls the teacher's room the *community of mourners*. Although I do not agree with the name, collaborative nagging cannot add anything to our

knowledge as teachers and can only produce negative attitudes; I'm fond of the saying: *A negative attitude is like a flat tire; you can't get anywhere unless you change it.*

3. Attend ELT Events

ELT events, such as conferences, symposiums, and courses, are not only events that start and end on specific dates—they can mean the beginning of projects, research, innovations, and inventions. Attending the events, we can meet new peers, get ideas for research, find solutions to our overwhelming problems, and share concerns and difficulties.

These events are places for finding people who have a lot in common with you, a community of practice. They are where new ideas trigger, new friendships begin, and new horizons open. Thanks to the pandemic, a lot of these events are online, and people can attend them from the comfort of their homes. Although being at an event and meeting people face-to-face is a far more enjoyable activity, online events provide an opportunity for teachers from underresourced organizations and countries to benefit from such gatherings.

4. Observe and Be Observed

What we can learn from observing a colleague is indisputable. Because teaching is a performance-based skill, seeing others in action can give us many ideas to use in our own practice, or it can spark new ideas. In addition, being observed can make us see our own classrooms from another person's eyes, and it can lead to invaluable reflection; they can see the parts of our teaching we are blind to. According to the [Johari window](#), this part of us is called the *blind self*: the part of our identity, personality, or behavior that is unknown to us but known to others. Being observed can help us open our eyes to problems we cannot recognize but others can.

5. Reflect on What You Do

Based on Schön's (1987) ideas on reflection, there are three types of reflection:

- **Reflection-for-action:** Thinking about an event like classroom teaching beforehand. For example, writing a lesson plan can be considered as this type of reflection.
- **Reflection-in-action:** This type of reflection covers all the instant, intuitive thinking a teacher does in a classroom during teaching. As teachers who deal with unpredictable creatures (human beings), this type of quick decision-making in the heat of a moment is a necessary skill for us.
- **Reflection-on-action:** The most well-known type of reflection, this is the one that happens after an event like classroom teaching when a teacher considers what has happened.

All three types of reflection can help teachers develop professionally and become critical individuals who do not just accept ideas but critically reflect upon them. To be able to be a reflective teacher, we first need to gather data. For this, we need to familiarize ourselves with data collection procedures in reflective teaching, such as questionnaires, interviews, action research, and the like. Then, we need to insert it into our daily routine by, for example, writing in a teaching diary every night before sleep.

6. Read, Read, and Write

I have two *reads* and one *write* in this tip to emphasize that you should read twice what you write. Bear in mind that reading (without writing) can keep you at the level of a recipient of the knowledge. To get to the next level of professional development, you should enter the world of producing knowledge and not just consuming it. Write teaching diaries, personal blogs, magazine articles, and anything else that can help you think critically about your teaching issues. Share them with others, have them reviewed, receive feedback, apply the feedback, and create a network of people who care about your writing.

Conclusion

As I've argued [elsewhere](#), professional development is not easy and sometimes even painful (Kamali, 2021); however, it is the only way to thrive and flourish in any profession. The tips in this article are only some of the ways we can continue our journey on the professional development path.

References

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