

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Larysa Andreyko (Sumy, Ukraine)

True master approaches teaching of every class as if it is his first.

Old Chinese proverb

Being a teacher in today's society is a difficult yet rewarding job. An effective teacher is not only the master of her subject area, but also an educator with a strong emotional backbone.

Students need or expect their teachers to inspire, challenge, and stimulate them. Ericksen stated that, "effective learning in the classroom depends on the teacher's ability ... to maintain the interest that brought students to the course in the first place" (2). Students' motivation to learn English highly depends on the teacher's ability to maintain the initial interest that brought the students into the English classroom. In this context, a major importance can be attributed to the teachers' qualifications in the area of English teaching.

Research shows that teacher knowledge profoundly affects student achievement. Darling-Hammond says flatly that teachers who lack knowledge of content and/ or teaching strategies cannot offer their students adequate learning opportunities. In today's high stakes education climate, those students may then be penalized — for example, held back or not allowed to graduate — when, in fact, the problem is the system's failure to provide them with qualified teachers (1).

Above all, teachers should aim to develop their knowledge of the subject matter they teach. If this is English, teachers can study the language to further their understanding of how it works, they can enroll in language development courses, and they can seek opportunities to practise and develop their ability to listen to, read, speak and write in English, for example, by not missing the opportunities they have to interact orally with native speakers, subscribing to EFL/ESL magazines, and participating in discussions on the Web.

Teachers should also aim at deepening their understanding of the theories underpinning learning and teaching practices. This can be achieved by reading about teaching and learning, attending seminars and workshops regularly, and enrolling on methodology courses which will enable them to reconstruct their knowledge of the background to language learning and teaching.

The more teachers know their students, the more effective their teaching will be. Teachers can get to know students better by giving them opportunities to talk about themselves, really listening to what they have to say, encouraging them to give teachers feedback on anything and everything that happens in the classroom, showing a real interest in them, observe their behaviour during teaching events.

In addition to knowing about the subject matter, theories of learning and teaching, and the students, teachers should aim at improving their ability to put all this knowledge into practice and becoming more skilful at teaching. This can be achieved by having a daring and exploratory attitude towards teaching which involves trying out different methods, techniques and activities again and again, reflecting on their effectiveness, and capitalizing on these experiences in order to make the necessary changes to their teaching habits.

In this context, it is reassuring to quote Patrick Jackson's questions, which he fairly asked in the light of recent food industry scandals: so what are you bringing to the table? Are your lessons nice and fresh or a bit stale and mouldy? Is your presentation crisp and crunchy or a getting rather tired and floppy? Do you use enough organic local ingredients? Are your lessons colourful and attractive or bland and uninviting? Do they change with the seasons or is it the same thing all year round? Do you even get to choose what is on the menu and do your students get to feel like they have choice too? Are there some tasty treats and snacks to brighten things up now and again? Is there enough variety and balance? What utensils do you use to prepare, serve and eat? Does it all come to the table piping hot or have your materials got the look and feel of yesterday's cold pizza? Do your students get enough chance to 'cook' for themselves or is it always a one-way process? (3)

Finally, teacher development has much to do with developing and sustaining a positive attitude towards the activity of teaching and oneself as a teacher. Teachers must

plan their lessons regularly, aim at being better informed about their profession, and respect themselves, their colleagues and their students.

References

1. Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). 'Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence'
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2. Ericksen, S. C. (1978). 'The Lecture. Memo to the Faculty'
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2. Jackson P. (2013) 'Thoughts on "Are your young learners getting their five a day?'"
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