

## **“Expert” Teachers and Career Satisfaction in Adult ESL: More than Mere Experience**

ELSA Net has provided professional development opportunities for its members for some time. We pride ourselves in offering quality services. In the coming years we will be exploring the incorporation of some of the following principles and practices into our professional development events.

Adult (settlement) ESL encourages us to see expertise in the many faces around us. Students are experts in their former occupations and in the languages and cultures they bring to the classroom. Governments and communities offer expertise in assisting with the settlement and adaptation of newcomers as they struggle to cope with their new lives. Likewise, our colleagues offer valuable insights, including novice recruits who arrive with unique perspectives garnered through recent teacher certification or experiences with new technologies or in diverse cultures and contexts.

As we mature in our professional lives, it is important to ask what forms of expertise we are developing as settlement adult ESL teachers. In their CAELA Network Brief on “Professional Development for Experienced Teachers Working with Adult English Language Learners,” Amber Rodriguez and Sharon McKay describe “expert” teachers as more than just “experienced” or “non-novice” teachers. Below are some of the specific characteristics of professional expertise they identified in adult ESL teaching.

**“Expert” Teachers.** Expert teachers not only have more experience than novice teachers, they develop and display the following characteristics in their teaching and professional practices:

- Have a rich and elaborate knowledge base
- Use different kinds of knowledge
- Apply intuitive judgements based on experience
- Desire to investigate and solve a wide range of teaching problems (i.e., are curious and inquire into professional practices.)
- Understand students’ needs and learning
- Integrate and understand instructional objectives and language learning strategies
- Are aware of the ambient learning context
- Display fluidity and automaticity in teaching
- Show efficiency and effectiveness in lesson planning

**Developing “Expertise” and Career Satisfaction.** Huberman’s 1993 study identified three activities associated with teachers who develop expertise and lifelong career satisfaction:

- **Shift Roles.** These teachers shift content areas or levels or, alternatively, take on new responsibilities in administration or mentoring peers.

- **Engage in Classroom-Level Experimentation.** These teachers demonstrate more willingness for risk-taking and engaging in new or experimental projects and approaches in their teaching.
- **Participate in Activities that Challenge Knowledge and Skills.** Motivated by challenge, these teachers constantly revitalize their teaching contents, materials, approaches, and perspectives.

**Professional Development Activities that Encourage Teacher Expertise.** Below are three forms of professional development that support the cultivation of teacher expertise:

**(1) Action Research.** Action research is an approach to classroom inquiry and experimentation by teachers into their own teaching practices. It involves systematically implementing, observing, and measuring or evaluating the effectiveness of new modules, units, contents, approaches or orientations, and then using those findings to inform one's teaching practices in the future. Although oriented on one's own teaching, the more formal or systematic the data gathering process becomes, the more readily teachers can share their insights with colleagues through professional development venues like PODs, conferences or in-house workshops.

**(2) Mentoring, Coaching, and Peer Observations.** Observing peers or having a teacher mentor or coach support your development as a teacher can be important and instructive, especially if that teacher is an expert at their craft. Alternatively, taking on mentoring or coaching junior or more novice colleagues also offers a way to reinvigorate your interest in teaching and to heighten the degree of awareness and reflectivity in your own teaching practices. What is clear is that the process of communication and exchange is itself beneficial to the cultivation of expertise for both the purported novice and expert.

**(3) Reflection.** Finally, it is the process of heightening your ability, capacity, and inclination to reflect on your teaching practice that is most crucial to developing expertise and satisfaction. Below are three effective strategies for enhancing your reflective capacity as a teacher.

- (i) **Study Circles.** (See PODs initiative to follow.) Study circles are self-initiated and self-directed, usually informal and voluntary, meetings between teachers to explore a common issue, problem, topic, resource, or book together. By building a community around a shared interest or endeavour, social motivators contribute to the intrinsic motivation of the inquiry itself. Accordingly, even if supported by the institution or workplace, it is important they are voluntary.
- (ii) **Reflective Teaching.** Also known as "inquiry teaching," this involves a systematic use of inquiry and reflection as a method of feedback, usually supported through small inquiry groups with or without a facilitator.

(iii) **Reflective Writing.** Writing is a proven way to enhance reflection and awareness. Here are some forms of reflective writing identified by Rodriguez and McKay:

- Journals (independent, interactive, on-line)
- Creating a cumulative teacher portfolio
- Writing critical analyses of incidence or case studies
- Participating in online professional development discussion boards (like the ELSA Net e-learning portal accessible on our Website, [www.elsanet.org](http://www.elsanet.org) )

The above summary was adapted from Rodriguez, A.G., McKay, S. (2010). Professional development for experienced teachers working with adult English language learners. *CAELA Network Brief*, May 2010, Accessed on October 20 at:

<http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/resources/experienced.html>