

# THE WAY LANGUAGE TEACHERS LEARN: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH THE EYES OF EXPERIENCED LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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*The development of teacher trainees in initial teacher education has been widely researched as well as the difficulties of the first year of teaching. The research described in this paper aims to explore the professional development (PD) experienced by practising teachers. Findings of the study might be useful in curriculum development both in teacher education and in other professional courses. The aim of the study was to investigate experienced language learners' perceptions concerning the PD of practising language teachers using qualitative methods. How do experienced learners themselves perceive their language teachers' PD? The participants, adults and young adults, were asked to take part in unstructured interviews. The objective was to pool the insights of language learners who had had lengthy and/or intensive language learning pasts and had had the opportunity to monitor several teachers of English. The two most important topics that emerged during the analysis of the interviews were the need for life-long learning and the need to adapt to student needs. According to experienced language learners, teacher education appears to be good enough for entry into the profession but new motivation and impetus are necessary for someone to remain a language teacher.*

**Keywords:** language learning, language teaching, professional development, qualitative research

## Introduction

The aim of the study is to gain insight into the perceptions of experienced language learners as regards their language teachers' professional development. The study might reveal whether experienced learners of English and other languages perceive the need for change and development during the career of a language teacher and what domains of knowledge they find the most important from their points of view. Learners' perspectives may contribute to identifying salient features of professional development. In addition, findings might be useful for teacher educators and trainees as well as for language teachers who would like to explore their own professional development.

The rationale for this study was provided by the fact that no studies have dealt with students' perceptions of language teacher development. The way

trainees or teachers perceive their own becoming a teacher has been studied extensively (e.g. Hobson et al., 2005), just as various aspects of the first year of a beginner teacher's career (E.g. Farrel, 2006; Lang, 1999; McCormack et al., 2006; Schuck, 2003; Brady & Schuck, 2005). Kagan (1992), for instance, found that there is a stability and inflexibility of prior beliefs and images and there is little evidence of reflective thinking in the case of novice teachers. Reflection, or to be more precise, the reflective cycle of professional development (Wallace, 1998), however, is regarded by many as fundamental to improving teachers' expertise.

There have been numerous contributions on components of teacher knowledge and where it might come from (Elliot, 1989; Hobson et al, 2005; Kagan, 1992; Mann, 2005; Roberts, 1998 cited in Mann, 2005; Wallace, 1998). The attention of teacher educators has shifted towards notions of 'teacher research', 'reflective practice', 'exploratory teaching', 'action research', and 'practitioner inquiry'. Advocates of these assume that "such processes have a reflexive relationship with the construction of teacher knowledge and beliefs" (Mann, 2005 p. 103). Thus, it would be interesting to examine which components experienced learners of English attach the greatest importance to, since they are the key beneficiaries of a teacher development.

The research questions the present study aims to explore are the following: How do experienced learners of English perceive (English) language teaching competence? How do they perceive English and other language teachers' need for development?

## Literature Review

### What is professional development?

Terminological difficulties arise as soon as one attempts to study professional development. The term professional development appears to be a widely used one (E.g. Mann, 2005) but other parallel terms exist such as teacher learning (Richards, 1998), teacher development (Dobson, 2006; Head & Taylor, 1997; Underhill, 1986) or expertise in teaching (Berliner, 2001). In this study, the term professional development (PD) will be used to mean the on-going, self-directed and autonomous effort of a teacher to acquire new knowledge and skills and continually improve them after initial formal training in their career. In their PD, the teacher plays an active role, i.e. it is self-development that is at the centre (Mann, 2005). In the literature, a distinction is made between PD and teacher development. PD is regarded as more career-oriented, while teacher development is thought to include moral, personal, ethical and value dimensions (Mann, 2005). PD is considered to entail a micro-political dimension, an aspect researched by Kelchtermans and Ballet, which refers to the strategies and tactics used by teachers to create the desired working conditions (2002). In this study, the use of the term PD, however, will not entail a focus on teachers' furthering their career or the exclusion of moral, personal, ethical or value dimensions. In this study PD will be used to refer to both PD and teacher development.

### Language Teaching Competence

This study was conceived based on the assumption that language teachers never cease to develop in the course of their careers. Although "a lot of teachers think 'Now that I am qualified, my professional education is over'

(Bolitho, 1986 cited in Head & Taylor), a great number of them seem to agree with Underhill and aim to become "the best kind of teacher they can personally be" (Underhill, 1986).

It is worth considering what the literature says about the kind of expertise language teachers need to be equipped with and in what way they might improve it.

According to psychologists, there are two kinds of knowledge: declarative knowledge, that is, the knowledge of or about information and procedural knowledge, that is, what we know how to do. An additional kind of knowledge may be knowledge about knowledge, which includes some reflection on or critical evaluation of one's own knowledge. The complexity of language teacher competence is better understood if one examines the components it is said to comprise. Received or content knowledge that a trainee is supposed to internalize at university is vital. As regards language teachers, this kind of knowledge might be made up of knowledge domains such as language proficiency, syntax, phonetics, pragmatics, knowledge about the language, etc. Some consider personal or experiential knowledge, just as well as local or contextual knowledge of the utmost importance (Mann, 2005; Wallace, 1991 cited in Mann, 2005) and yet others suggest that the political or micropolitical dimension cannot be neglected (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Elliot, 1993). Kagan lists procedural knowledge, knowledge of pupils, classrooms, and self based on her empirical research (1992). It is evident that without excellent communication and interpersonal skills or presentation skills no teacher will be successful. Richards (1998) proposes six domains of content: theories of teaching, teaching skills, communication skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision making, and contextual knowledge.

Even though very different domains are proposed, there seems to be an agreement on second language teaching being "a multifaceted yet integrated activity" in which "each of the domains overlaps and intersects with others" (Richards, 1998). Berliner has reminded us that the romantic concept of "talent" for teaching is "probably an extremely complicated interaction of many human characteristics" (Berliner, 2001 p. 465).

### Sources of Professional development

Language teachers can choose a number of techniques to assist them in their professional development. Mann (2005) lists reflection, research, self-monitoring and self-evaluation as vital sources of development. Action research or "self-reflective enquiry carried out by practitioners" may result in personal and professional growth as well, as Wallace points out (1998). Collaboration with colleagues might be another way to grow professionally (Roberts, 1998 cited in Mann, 2005). Collaboration in action research, too, might improve the quality of teaching in an institution (Burns, 1999; Wallace, 1998). Learning from colleagues is a learning experience often mentioned in the literature: Drawing a parallel between workplaces in general and schools in particular Underhill coined the phrase 'The Learning School' by which he means a community of school teachers working in a given school who, by doing tasks and facing challenges with everyone involved, actually learn together. He believes the quality of the teaching is a function of the quality of the learning that is undertaken by the school and its staff (2004). Learning from colleagues is also mentioned by Hobson et al: In a large-scale study in England, past, potential or actual relationships with students, former and present teachers, teacher colleagues have been found to

be "central to the becoming a teacher experience" in initial teacher training (Hobson et al, 2005).

### The nature of professional development

In the literature, professional development is characterized as a stressful, painful but unavoidable phenomenon. It is also regarded as closely tied to teachers' experience. For development to take place it is crucial for a teacher to enter into a dialogue with their experience, to turn the experiential knowledge into propositional knowledge (Bond et al., 1993).

Professional development in the life of a teacher implies changes in their routines, behaviour, thinking or even self-concept. "Learning changes our knowing, our doing and our being" as Claxton put it (1999). These changes might induce a large amount of stress in teachers' professional lives. The stressful nature of the teaching profession and the inevitable burnout have been written about extensively (e.g. Dunham, 1992; Head and Taylor, 1997; Horwitz, 1996). Professional development is not only stressful, however. It might also be painful, as Korthagen (2004) puts it. According to him, changes might affect different levels of the teacher's self. He uses the 'onion' model and argues that changes influencing the outer levels, that is, a teacher's behaviour or competencies, take place more easily, while changes at the level of beliefs, images, beliefs about one's own self, or professional identity, let alone the level of mission, are brought about "much less easily and much more painfully" (pp. 77-97).

### Experience at the heart of teaching

In most models of second language teaching the theoretician-practitioner divide is a fulcrum (Stern, 1983). Theoretical linguists are thought to provide the theories and language teachers are supposed to put the theories into practice. Some have written about the gap between theory and practice (Clarke, 1994; Nunan, 1993; Somekh, 1993) while Widdowson argues that "theory is not remote from practical experience but a way of making sense of it" (2003, p.4). However, many practitioners believe that most learning in the teaching field comes from teachers' own practical experience and no formal training is as useful as classroom experience.

Learning, for theorists of experiential learning, takes place when a person "enters into a dialogue with their experience (...) which is created in the transaction between the learner [the teacher-learner] and the milieu in which he or she operates" (Bond et al, 1993, p. 8 and 11.). There is no shortcut to becoming an expert teacher, Westerman concludes (1991). Studying the decision-making processes of novice and experienced teachers he found that novice teachers did not possess the elaborate schemata about teaching, classrooms and learners that expert teachers had. Experiential or reflective learning, i.e. the "purposeful framing and reframing of material in internal experience with the intention of learning" has a central role in teachers' PD (Moon, 2004, p. 99.). The best-known campaigner of reflective or experiential learning, Schön, in his book entitled 'Educating the Reflective Practitioner' (1986), advocates both learning by doing and learning by coaching in a variety of professions. Coaching is the continuous support given to novice professionals by experienced senior colleagues on entering the workplace. Coaching, nonetheless, is not a frequently used technique to support beginner teachers in Hungary, or elsewhere (Maggioli, 2003).

## Method

### The instrument

Since it was participants' views, thoughts and perceptions that were to be investigated by the study, the research was bound to be qualitative. Unstructured interviews appeared to be adequate as they allow the researcher to learn from the participant who acts as an expert of the phenomenon under scrutiny (deMarras, 2004). In this study, participants were considered to be experts since they had been exposed to the teaching of a large number of language teachers. Consequently, an interview guide for a phenomenological interview was developed in order to explore how experienced learners perceive the development and knowledge of teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL). Knowing that "predesigned and structured instruments blind the researcher to the site" (Miles and Huberman, 1994), the aim was to keep the interviews as unstructured as possible in order to allow participants to elaborate on their views. Every attempt was made to "capture what people say *in their own words* [author's emphasis]" (Patton, 2002). This in fact resulted in most participants summarizing not only their experience in learning English but other languages as well. Moreover, one participant ended up theorizing about English language teaching (Ann) and another one about education in general (Steven).

The interviews were conducted in the learners' mother tongue, Hungarian in all cases. The questions were designed to elicit what kind of knowledge a teacher needs, whether they have been taught by a good English or other language teacher, what made them a good one, what training teachers need during their career, etc. Learners were also asked to draw a graphic representation of a language teacher's career or a learning curve and explain it to the researcher. Biodata was collected about each participant (See the complete Interview guide in Hungarian and in English in Appendix 1.)

### Validating the Instrument

In order to perfect the instrument, the interview guide, which was first drafted on the basis of the author's own experience, was redrafted after consulting the literature and two researchers. The interview guide was also slightly modified after conducting two pilot interviews.

The validation process resulted in the addition of further questions and prompts. The questions: "Have you ever had a really good English teacher? What made her a good one?" "What institution did you learn English in?" or "What should a teacher of English learn if they decide to attend a course?" were added following the advice of an expert-researcher. The task of having to draw a learning curve was extended to include both reality and the ideal situation since one of the participants of the validation interviews wished to clarify the question by asking "Do you mean ideally or in reality?". In addition to the above, the validation process prepared the researcher to be able to provide maximum freedom to the participants in the interviews. Also, the validation interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to practice interviewing skills for the final research interviews.

### Participants\*

Seven experienced adult or young-adult language learners were selected for the interviews. This age group was selected because, compared to younger learners, young adults or adults already have the ability to articulate their opinion on what competences their teachers need and in what ways they need to develop.

In terms of their experience, the criteria for their selection included the following: Participants have learnt or learnt English and other languages for several years and/or have had or had very many teachers of languages. Learners who were once students in a special English class at secondary grammar school were also considered to be useful sources of information because these students usually had the same teachers for many years and many contact hours (6-12 45-minute sessions) per week. The youngest participant was 19 years old, most of the remaining participants are between 30 and 39. (See details of the participants' background in Table 1.). Piloting the interview was carried out by interviewing former students of the teacher-researcher. Data collection was mostly carried out with participants the researcher had never taught but two of the participants had previously been taught by the researcher. The seven participants of the project were selected by convenience sampling. For easy identification, the participants have been given English pseudonyms.

*Table 1. Major participant characteristics*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Languages spoken (or learnt in brackets)</b>	<b>Language learning experience (in number of years)</b>	<b>Number of language teachers</b>	<b>Job</b>
Ann	20-29	English, German	17	20	Café manager
Irene	20-29	English, Italian	15	16-18	Student
Maureen	30-39	English, German, (Russian)	15-20	10	Human resources manager in a bank
Brian	19	English, French	8	8	Student
Muriel	30-39	English, German, Russian	12	7	Custody manager in a bank
Steven	30-39	English, Italian, (Russian)	9	5	Fashion store manager
Tina	20-29	English, German, Spanish	15	20	Marketing assistant

\* The author thanks all the participants for sharing their views with her and Edit Kontra (Eötvös University, Budapest) for reviewing the first draft of the paper. Without the kind help of a co-coder, the analysis would be less reliable.

The most evident limitation of the study is that it is based on one-off interviews. The study would have benefited greatly from the prolonged engagement of the researcher in the lives of the people who were involved in the project. This was almost impossible in some cases as the participants are all very busy people.

Ann is a recent business school graduate working as café manager at the moment. Having graduated from an American school in Vienna, she is a fluent speaker of English and German and has a high number of foreign friends. She is an enthusiastic language learner and is proud of her mother who has recently started learning English on her own.

Irene was a business school student near graduation when she was interviewed. She attended a special English class at secondary school and as a result is a near-native speaker of English. Before she was interviewed she had spent a term in Italy as an Erasmus exchange student.

Maureen works as a human resources manager in a bank that operates in Central and Eastern Europe. She has learnt English, German and Russian in various circumstances: state schools, language schools, and one-to-one situations. As regards the learning of English, which is the most important language for her, she is an autonomous learner who does a considerable amount of self-study.

Brian had finished secondary grammar school when he was interviewed. He is a fluent speaker of English and French, both of which he learnt through hard work and mostly traditional methods in state schools, language schools and in one-to-one situations.

Muriel is a custody manager in a bank who has two degrees, one in horticulture and one in economics. Apart from the fact that she used to go to a special Russian class, Muriel is considered to be an experienced learner of English and German as well, having done all three languages for 8 to 12 years. She believes that language are best taught through cultural studies.

Steven is a clothes shop manager who frequently used both Italian and English in his job. He has learnt a lot of what he knows now on the job even though he has been taught in various schools, from primary to tertiary education and private teachers. He does not consider himself a successful language learner and does not have high opinion of education in general.

Tina works as a marketing assistant and studies for an M.Sc. degree at a business school. She spent some time studying in Seattle and is known for her desire to perfect her English among her friends. She has been taught by more than twenty teachers, many of whom were native speakers of the language. She believes her love of English stems from having been taught by one particular teacher.

## Procedures of Data Collection

Prior to the interviews, all participants had been informed that the interview would be about language teachers. Two of the participants wished to know what questions they would be asked. One of them, Muriel, was a very busy executive manager and she wanted to save time while the other, Brian was the youngest participant, who probably wanted to prepare for the interview. Therefore, for the purposes of familiarization, the questions had been provided to them. All the participants were assured of confidentiality. Interviews lasted 16 to 29 minutes and three were recorded in the participants' workplaces, while four were recorded in public places such as cafés and a park. Because of technical difficulties, one of the participants, Maureen, was hardly audible on the recording, and thus the interview was reconstructed rather than transcribed. All the other interviews were fully transcribed. All the participants were interviewed in their mother tongue and they all gave their consent to the use of the transcripts for research purposes.

The interviews were conducted bearing in mind that they ought to resemble conversations (Cohen et al., 2000) and even though a standardised

interview guide was used in each case, no two interviews were conducted using exactly the same wording. The questions were slightly changed to accommodate individual differences and the relationship between researcher and interviewee. This way, as suggested by McDonough and McDonough (1997), more room was given for individual expression. The majority of the interviews included spontaneous, relevant answers from the participants, with questions typically remaining short and answers long, although the youngest participant needed more prompting during the interviews. The researcher had the opportunity to ask for clarification, so the interviews were interpreted as they went on. Thus, the interviews met most of Kvale's quality criteria (cited in Cohen et al, 2000).

### Procedures of Data Analysis

The interviews were not analysed on a question by question basis since many of the questions were interrelated and the data respondents were able to provide was merely meaningful within the respondents' own framework of reference. Instead, the data was analysed using the constant comparative method, as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and Szokolszky (2004), with one alteration: the analysis was carried out using colour coding on the computer and not paper, glue, pens, cards, etc. First, units of meaning were identified in the transcripts of the interviews. Then emerging themes were looked for and the emerging themes were compared with concepts found in the literature.

As advocated by Halliday (2002), data analysis began while the data collection was going on. After every interview, the researcher attempted to identify the most important lesson she learnt from each interview.

### Results and discussion

During the data-collection phase, the researcher made two very important observations. Even though the participants did not mention the term "life-long learning", they all referred to the need for teachers to continue learning throughout their career as a teacher. The other salient feature of the interviews was how adaptable and flexible learners expect their language teachers to be. In the following, each of these emerging themes will be discussed in more detail. Last, participants' views on the way language teachers (can) learn will be presented. (Excerpts from the interviews are presented here in the author's translation. The original Hungarian transcription can also be found in Appendix 2. in the same order as they appear in the text.)

### Life-long learning

It is puzzling to see how two participants coming from two very different backgrounds used exactly the same wording to express the idea that every professional needs to develop during their career. They both remarked "no-one is ever ready" meaning no-one is ever ready to stop learning, although in different contexts:

I think that it is in their practice that the strengths and weaknesses of a teacher come to the surface. Just like those of an economist or anybody else. And then he knows what he has to improve. So, *no-one is ever ready* (author's emphasis) and you can't stop learning. We don't stop in our own profession, either. There is always something new happening in the Custody Department. There is a new

product. A foreign client writes to us, I have to look up a few words. What could he mean? (Muriel)

The above excerpt comes from an interview with Muriel, a female executive manager in a Budapest bank, who has two degrees, one in horticulture and the other in economics. Muriel went to a special English class at a provincial secondary school, learnt English and Russian in a high number of lessons and uses English on a daily basis. In the interview it became clear that she attaches great importance to teaching a language through culture and customs. Compare this economist's view with that of a fashion store manager, who once went to teacher training college:

*No-one is ever ready.* (Author's emphasis) Even 10 years after your graduation, you aren't finished. A teacher is never finished, especially if we take it into account that a graduate has had almost no teaching practice, although I don't know what it's like now, but I know that there is very little teaching practice and you can graduate from a teacher training college without any teaching behind you, which would be a real must. So, you aren't finished. That's why a lot of people leave the profession when they face what they should be doing. And it doesn't work for them. Because it doesn't suit them or they aren't prepared and they experience failures. So, *no-one is ever ready.* (Steven)

Despite having a degree in lower primary school teaching, Steven has been working in the fashion industry for several years. At the moment, he is the store manager of an upmarket fashion chain, and he happens to be a very disappointed learner of English. He spent several years being exposed to boring and useless English lessons in which the standard procedure was for the teacher to read out a text first, "the text" in his words, which would be followed by the children doing the same several times. The procedure ended in children having to recite "the text" and getting a mark for it. Steven learnt most of what he knows now on the job, in real communication and that is what he believes in. Steven is also a proficient speaker of Italian, which he has learnt both in language schools and an immersion setting.

The need for development and being "updated" in every profession was emphasized by Tina, as well:

Interviewer: All right. Imagine a person of your age, a graduate with a degree that enables her to teach English. She's thrown in at the deep end, can she stop learning?

Respondent: No.

Interviewer: That was a quick reply.

Respondent: No, you can't stop learning in any profession. (Tina)

A recent business school graduate, Tina felt that a teacher needs to be up-to-date in a lot of fields. In addition to having the necessary vocabulary, she would need to be well-informed about topics that might occur during the lesson so that she could enter in-depth discussions. This would mean having to follow the news on television, radio or the Internet. A teacher of business English, she added, would need to be aware of all recent developments in the economy. "In a healthy situation, the desire to develop should be coming from within the person; if it doesn't, you can't force them to develop," Tina explains.

Is there a plateau? This was a question Muriel was asked when she was drawing the learning curve of a language teacher. "No, of course there isn't", she said. "My German teacher was learning at the age of 80." One respondent thought it was a personal trait of teachers that they like learning, and that is the reason for their becoming a teacher. In Ann's words: "a real

teacher, one who was born to become a teacher, she has it in her that she would improve herself till the end of her life because she likes learning. That's why she is a teacher and she enjoys transmitting her knowledge."

It appears from the graphic representations of the careers of language teachers, as well, that language teachers are expected to continue learning during the full course of their teaching career. Almost all curves about the professional development of the ideal teacher point in an upward direction with the exception of one, Steven's, in which there are upward and downward changes. Even Steven, nevertheless, says that a teacher needs challenges to "keep himself motivated to learn and teach". The curves that represent the learning curves of teachers in reality also indicate knowledge growth but respondents appear to think that there is less learning taking place than it would be desirable. Almost all participants attempted to show the relationship of time and knowledge on their graphs, with the exception of Steven, who talked about motivation. Tina thought it helped her to provide a meaningful graph if she differentiated between lexical knowledge and practical knowledge. She believed university studies provide lexical knowledge to future teachers while their school years equip them with practical knowledge. She added that when teachers' classroom behavior becomes automated, their attention might again turn to obtaining lexical knowledge.

An examination of what major turning points there are in teachers' lives in the eyes of experienced language learners reveals that their starting teaching, getting a degree and meeting new challenges in their professional lives are considered to be important milestones. According to Tina, Ann and Steven, another important milestone might be the time when the teacher already knows the ins and outs of her job, but by that time she experiences burn-out as well: "If they could at that point find something that motivates them, they could reap the benefits" (Tina).

## Adaptability

The second most salient feature of the interviews was that learners take it for granted that their language teachers need to adapt to the changing circumstances. This was mentioned in relation to students, groups, age groups, schools or the language itself. It is very probable that Tina's "updatedness" also refers to being adaptable and flexible in relation to students' interests.

Ann, Brian and Steven all referred to the need to follow changes the language might undergo: a teacher has to know "the actual state of the language" (Brian) and "the changes in the language, new slang, new expressions, which English is full of. There are new expressions born and then they die. It's useful if a teacher learns them" (Steven). Teachers should not "use the slang of ten years ago", emphasized Ann the need to improve one's language skills.

Irene mentioned the changes a teacher has to live with if she decides to work for another kind of educational institution: "if she has a new job, the teacher will have to be trained in the requirements of the given workplace". Brian also expressed a similar view when he remarked that a teacher has to be familiar with language exams and requirements.

Muriel thought that language teaching only makes sense if it takes it into consideration what learners need. She described one of the courses she had attended. This English language course was organized by the bank and

employees were supposed to learn business English but the teacher appeared to be ignorant of many of the fields they worked in.

Researcher: So this was a course that failed.

Muriel: Absolutely, she didn't know simple... like 'safekeeping account', this was totally unknown to her. It would have been an unknown expression for my secondary school teacher, too, because this is specialist vocabulary, but she was here to teach us business English. And I wouldn't have condemned her if she had interviewed us in Hungarian about what problems we had and then she could have got prepared, but... (Muriel)

Steven even suggested that the teacher should spend the first few lessons "learning about the students and not teaching anything to them at all".

Irene believed that "every class needs something different", as well. Maureen, too, who usually has most of her English classes in the evening after work, emphasized that the teacher needs to be interesting enough, especially if "classes start at 5.30 and finish at 9 o'clock at night". Irene reported an interesting anecdote from her experience in which the teacher's ability to respond to the changing circumstances is central.

For example I had a teacher, I looked up to her because ... we had a problem: she didn't speak English during the lessons, only Hungarian. And when we asked her to do it in English because that's what we are used to [...]. . And then she said she would try. She said it would be difficult for her, but she spoke English of course, and she needed one or two weeks and then she got into it. (Irene)

### Teacher learning - how

A number of ways in which teachers can develop were cited by the participants. One finding of the study is how underrepresented among these learning through reflection, self-monitoring, or self-evaluation are. The phenomenon that is perhaps closest to the reflective cycle is learning from experience, or "getting the knack of it", as Irene put it, through having to do teaching. Motivating oneself was alluded to by one of the participants (Ann): "It's like if you do something well, you'd like to do it better, or practise it more because you get positive feedback from yourself. If you do something well, you feel motivated to do it even better. It's a sort of a wheel". It is interesting, however, that not one single participant mentioned that teachers could learn from their own mistakes or could experiment with new techniques and then draw the conclusions from how they work in the classroom. Doing classroom research, learning from research or learning from reading about research were not cited, either.

Nevertheless, learning from collaboration with other teachers or learners was alluded to by four of the participants. Irene cited in-class presentations as a means for teachers to learn about unknown fields just as well as "new ideas we came up with, a more creative idea that she hadn't thought of". Muriel mentioned the bank's in-house moderated training sessions every six months as an example that could be followed in schools as well. For these, executives working at the same level are summoned and invited to share their views. A moderator brings up a topic, to which everyone may contribute.

...there is a moderator who brings up topics like company culture, how to praise your people, how to scold them, there are issues like this in a teacher-student relationship, as well, and then we talk about it. So, I believe we can learn a lot

from each other in some way. We did organization at university, too, and human relations, we have some knowledge, but we can learn from one another. (Muriel)

Steven reported an incident in which his Italian teacher confused the Italian for kohlrabi with the Italian for cauliflower. He says: "It was kind of funny. He didn't know which was which and well, I happened to know." He had previously worked in a restaurant in Rome and fancied Italian cuisine. Replying to a question whether this was uncomfortable for anyone, he added that he did not believe this should be a problem. He remarked that he had a dentist friend who was at first afraid to invite her colleagues' opinion on difficult cases but learnt later from her own experience as a patient that consulting colleagues will eventually build confidence in her patients.

Tina thinks that it is essential for teachers who want to be successful to involve their students in the learning process. Involving the students will have the result that the lesson might take unanticipated turns, which might create learning opportunities for the teacher herself. In one of Tina's anecdotes, both teacher and learner underwent an enjoyable learning experience: "You can learn from anything, really, they [teachers] can learn from their students, I think".

We had homework like... We were asked to look up 20 illnesses. And the English teacher had such an impact on me that I looked up about a hundred illnesses by using printed dictionaries and seating my Mum and Dad in front of me and asking them what other illnesses there were... You have to admit that you can involve students and you can learn from them. (Tina)

Learning from the students was not only mentioned as a possible way of developing. One participant, Irene believed it would be odd if the students could teach the teacher something new in grammar. "We have never taught anything new in grammar to our teacher, that would be inappropriate", she said. The definable boundaries of grammar, it appears, make it an unchallengeable domain of the teacher. Tina, too, commented that she finds it hard to imagine that a teacher needs to improve her grammatical competence after graduating.

In the view of experienced learners of English, teachers need to be autonomous learners themselves. They need to "read a lot of foreign language texts," as Brian put it or get immersed in the culture of the target language (Irene, Muriel, Tina and Ann). Learning by teaching was a way of development not mentioned by other participants, but Maureen strongly believes if someone teaches a language, she will definitely develop in that language. It is common, in the author's experience, as well, for language teachers to opt for higher level students or courses in order to motivate themselves to better their foreign language competence.

An analysis of what components of teacher knowledge experienced language learners find the most important reveals that the most frequently mentioned component is the teacher's language competence. Within language competence, sociolinguistic competence, especially the knowledge of recent slang, was mentioned by several participants. A wide knowledge of the target language culture or cultures was considered useful by four of the seven participants while acceptable pronunciation was of great importance to one respondent. Other components that were mentioned were the following: the ability to change, pedagogical skills, the ability to explain language phenomena, and the ability to create opportunities for communication.

Even though being equipped with a wide vocabulary in English was often referred to by participants, not knowing something, for example the English

equivalent for a rare word, was considered to be an inconvenient situation only by Ann.

I had teachers with whom it wasn't inconvenient at all because they were such good teachers. We are all human beings and there is no-one who knows everything. But I had an English teacher ... I found it quite irritating that she didn't know it because I felt that she should not have been teaching the group I was in. She didn't have the necessary knowledge. (Ann)

Many other participants expressed their view that it was completely understandable if their teacher did not know something. An excerpt from the interview with Tina clearly illustrates this:

Respondent: If these are words that are extremeties, I have never thought of that as something negative. Provided the teacher says 'I am sorry' and looks it up...

Interviewer: That's important...

Respondent: Yes, looks it up and brings it to the next class. I don't think an English teacher is a living dictionary and I don't expect them to know the answer to my most extreme questions.

According to Tina, language teachers who do not know rare words or expressions will not lose their credibility as long as they attempt to compensate for their lack knowledge. Admitting not knowing something and making it clear that a language teacher is a learner of the target language will not only help the teacher save face but it will present a role-model for the learners.

## Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to investigate how experienced language learners perceive the need for the improvement of language teachers' expertise. The study revealed that the learners interviewed are well aware of teachers' having to improve their language teaching competence during their careers. They believe that teachers need to be up-to-date as regards the language, events in the news and the requirements of the school they operate in. Students expect their language teachers to be competent in everything students are interested in. The ability to improve their skills and knowledge and remain motivated to perform well in their jobs is crucial and at the same time taken for granted. Flexibility and adaptability are of the utmost importance in learners' view.

Interviewing seven experienced language learners it was found that the reflective teacher development model is unknown to these learners. Practitioner research or exploratory teaching are notions that were unfamiliar to participants of the study. However, learning from experience or obtaining practical knowledge might be terms the meaning of which approximate the meaning attached to reflection in English language teaching. According to the participants, the willingness to engage in life-long learning appears to be a pre-requisite for language teachers. Learning from colleagues and students was familiar to most participants, though not all of them, and many regard it as a natural concomitant of language classes. Looking at language teachers from a student's perspective, participants naturally focused on learning from students rather than colleagues.

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## Appendix 1

### Interview guide in Hungarian

Képzeld el egy angoltanárt, amint belép az osztályterembe. Szerinted milyen tudással kell belépnie?

*Plusz kérdések:*

*Milyen rész-tudásokra tudod az angoltanár tudását bontani?*

*Ezek egyformán fontosak számodra?*

*Volt már neked igazán jó angoltanárod? Mit tudott? Hol tanulta? Te tudnál jó tanár lenni?*

*Elfordult már veled, hogy valamit nem tudott az angoltanárod? Tudsz konkrét példát? Ciki ez? Mi történt?*

Amikor egy tanár megszerzi a diplomáját, szerinted kész van? Abbahagyhatja a tanulást?

*Plusz kérdések:*

*Mondta már neked angoltanár, hogy 'ma én is tanultam valamit'? Mi volt az? Miből, kitől tanulta? Hogyan tanulta?*

*Ha újra iskolába akarna járni egy angoltanár, mit javasolnál neki, hogy mit tanuljon?*

Ha grafikusan kellene bemutatnod egy angoltanár életpályáját a tanulás szempontjából, hogyan tudnád? Hogyan néz ki egy ilyen ábra ideális esetben? És a tapasztalatod szerint a valóságban?

*Plusz kérdések:*

*Egy grafikonban, vagy számegegyenesen el tudod ezt képzelni? Hogyan?*

### Interview guide in English

Imagine an English teacher entering the classroom. What knowledge does she need when she comes in?

*Prompts:*

*What components does her knowledge have?*

*Are these equally important for you?*

*Have you ever met a really good teacher of English? What was she good at? Where did she learn it? Would you be a good teacher?*

*Has it ever happened that your teacher did not know something? Can you give an example? Is this unpleasant? What happened?*

When a teacher graduates, is she ready to go into teaching? Can she stop learning?

*Prompts:*

*Has a teacher of English ever said to you that "I have learnt learnt something today"? What was it? Where did she learn it from? Who did she learn it from? How did she learn it?*

*If a teacher of English decides to go to school, what would you advise her to learn?*

If you had to give a graphic representation of the career of a teacher of English, how would you do it? What does a graph like this look like ideally? And what does it look like in reality?

*Prompts:*

*Can you envisage this on a graph or a continuum? How?*

**BIODATA**

What languages do you speak?

How long have you been learning languages?

How long have you been learning English?

What kind of institutions did you learn English in?

Did you learn general English or ESP?

How many English teachers have you had so far?

How old are you?

10-19

20-29

30-39

40-49

50-59

above 60

Qualifications

Male/Female

## Appendix 2

### Excerpt 1

Én azt gondolom, hogy a gyakorlati életben derül ki egy tanárnak az erőssége, a gyengesége. Ugyanúgy mint egy közgazdának, vagy bárki másnak. És akkor o tudja, hogy mi az amin erősítenie kell. Tehát *soha senki nincs kész* és a tanulást sem lehet abbahagyni. Tehát mi sem hagyjuk abba a saját szakmánkban. A letétkezelésen is minden nap történik valami. Van egy új termék. Ír a külföldi ügyfél, nekem is meg kell néhány szót nézнем. Hogy na most vajon o mire gondol. (Muriel)

### Excerpt 2

Senki nincs készen. Még 10 évvel a diploma után sincs készen. A tanár, az nincs készen, különösen ha arra gondolunk, hogy szakmai gyakorlat vagy tanítás, az szinte nincs is a háta mögött, már a jelenlegi képzést nem ismerem annyira, de azt tudom, hogy nagyon kevés van, a tanítóképzőt el lehet úgy végezni, hogy nem tanít az ember, pedig azt mindenképpen kellene. Tehát semmiképpen nincs kész. Ezért van hogy sokan elhagyják a pályát, mert akkor szembesülnek vele, hogy mit is kellene csinálni. És aztán nem megy. Vagy azért mert nem illik hozzájuk, vagy azért mert nincsenek rá felkészülve, és kudarcok érik őket. Hát.. Soha senki nincs kész. (Steven)

### Excerpt 3

I: Jó. Hasonló korú személyt képzelj el, mint magad, lediplomázott, diplomás angoltanár. Bedobják a mélyvízbe, abbahagyhatja-e a tanulást?

R: Nem.

I: Ezt nagyon gyorsan rávágta.

R: Nem. Szerintem semmilyen szakmában nem. (Tina)

### Excerpt 4

Amit mondtam az elején is, hogy nekem nagyon fontos, hogy valaki updated legyen, és minden területen. Legyen egy angoltanár, legyen egy bármilyen gazdasági szereplő, folyamatosan. Ha valakiben ez belülről nem jön, akkor sajnos már nem lehet kényszeríteni. Egészségesen ez valahogy belülről kellene, hogy jöjjön. (Tina)

### Excerpt 5

... egy igazi tanár, aki erre születik, abban benne van, hogy élete végéig fejlessze magát, mert ő szeret tanulni. Ezért tanár, és szereti átadni a tudását. (Ann)

### Excerpt 6

I: Ez egy sikertelen kurzus volt akkor.

R: Teljesen sikertelen, hát olyan alap... hogy safekeeping account, hogy értékpapírszámla, ez számára teljesen ismeretlen szó volt. Ami lehet az angoltanáromnak a gimiben is ismeretlen szakkifejezés, mert ez már egy szakmai nyelv, de aki eljön szakmát oktatni, és még akkor sem tartottam volna megvetendő dolognak, ha előtte interjúztat bennünket magyarul, és

pontosan megkérdezi, hogy milyen problémáink vannak, és akkor fölkészül rá. De ... (Muriel)

#### **Excerpt 7**

... pl. egy tanárom, nagyon becsültem benne, egy probléma volt, hogy nem angolul tartotta az órákat, hanem magyarul és mikor mi kértük, hogy legyen angolul, mert mi ehhez vagyunk szokva, [...]. És akkor ő igenis azt mondta, hogy megpróbálja, nehéz lesz, de tud angolul ugye, de azért egy-két hét kellett és akkor belerázódott, ... (Irene)

#### **Excerpt 8**

Ez olyan, hogyha valaki valamit jól csinál, még jobban szeretné csinálni, vagy még többet szeretné gyakorolni, mert visszajelzéseket kap saját magától, mert ha valaki valamit jól csinál, akkor még jobban motiválva érzi magát, hogy még jobban akarom csinálni. Ezt egy ilyen mókuseréknek is mondhatjuk... (Ann)

#### **Excerpt 9**

... van egy ilyen moderátor, o vet fel témákat, szervezeti kultúra, hogy dicsérd meg az embereidet, hogyan szidd meg őket, ilyenek a tanár-diák kapcsolatban is vannak, és megbeszéljük. Tehát azt gondolom, hogy egymástól is nagyon sokat lehet tanulni, valamilyen módon. Tehát mi is tanultunk szervezést, vagy emberi kapcsolatokat, van egy tudásunk, de egymástól is sokat lehet tanulni (Muriel)

#### **Excerpt 10**

És igazándiból mindennel tanulunk, ők tudnak szerintem a diákjaiktól tanulni. Voltak olyan házi feladatunk, hogy feladták, hogy keressünk ki húsz betegséget. És rám olyan hatással volt az angoltanár, hogy én valami százvalamennyit kikerestem ezzel a manuális szótározós módszerrel, leültem anyut aput és kérdeztem, hogy ezenkívül milyen betegségek vannak még... El kell ismerni azt, hogy be lehet vonni a diákokat és valóban lehet tőlük tanulni. (Tina)

#### **Excerpt 11**

Volt olyan tanárom, akinél egyáltalán nem volt kínos, mert annyira jó tanár volt, hogy igazából emberek vagyunk és nincs olyan, aki mindent tud. De volt olyan angoltanár, akinél irritált, hogy nem tudja, mert úgy éreztem, hogy nem rendelkezik megfelelő tudással, és azt a csoportot, amiben én voltam, neki nem szabadott volna tanítania (Ann)

#### **Excerpt 12**

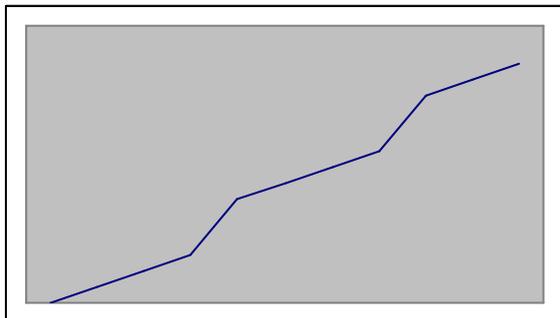
R: Ha olyan szavak, ami nagyon extrém, soha nem jött vissza negatívan nálam. Hogyha a tanár megmondja, hogy hát bocsánat, ezt nem tudom, de utánanéző.

I: Ez lényeges...

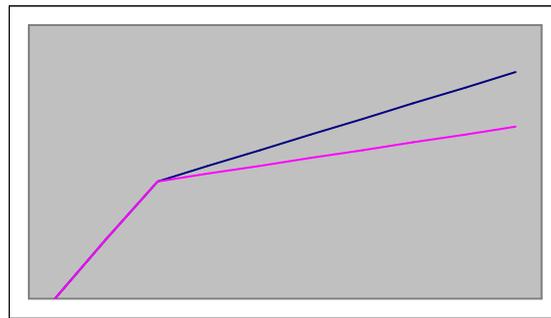
R: Igen, tehát utánanéző és a következő órára behozza. Én úgy gondolom, hogy egy angoltanár sem egy élő szótár, és nem várom el azt, hogy a legextrémebb kérdéseimre is választ tudjon adni. (Tina)

### Appendix 3

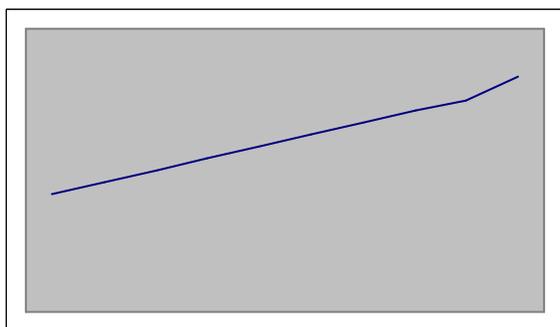
#### Participants' graphs



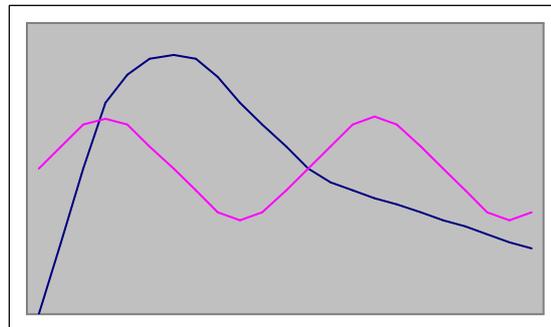
Ann



Muriel

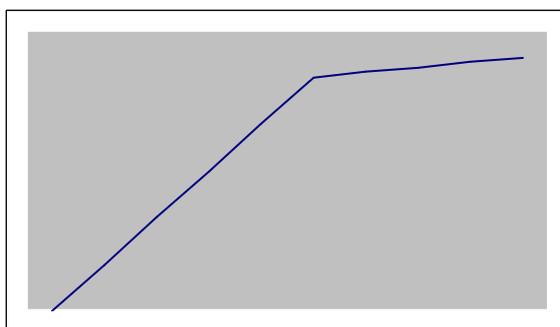


Brian

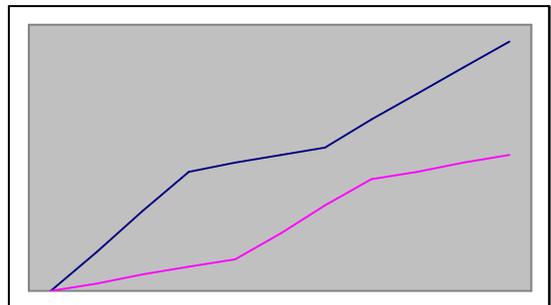


Steven

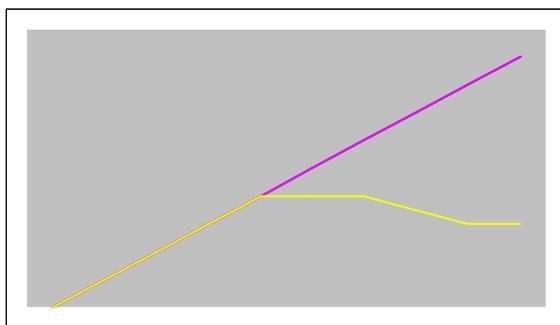
Brian



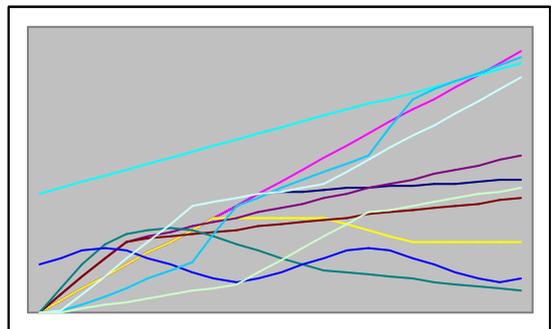
Irene



Tina



Maureen



All participants