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978-0-521-84911-1 - Professional Development for Language Teachers: Strategies for Teacher Learning

Jack C. Richards and Thomas S. C. Farrell

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Strategies for Teacher Learning

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Series editor's preface

Second and foreign language teaching provides a career for hundreds of thousands of teachers worldwide, and the vast educational enterprise of English language teaching could not operate effectively without the dedication and effort of such teachers day by day and year by year throughout their careers. Maintaining the interest, creativity, and enthusiasm of experienced language teachers in their profession is one of the challenges faced by program coordinators, school principals, and teacher-educators. Teachers need to expand their roles and responsibilities over time if they are to continue to find language teaching rewarding, and it is the responsibility of schools and other educational institutions to provide opportunities for teachers to develop longer-term career goals and opportunities over time.

The field of language teaching is subject to rapid changes, both as the profession responds to new educational paradigms and trends and as institutions face new challenges as a result of changes in curriculum, national tests, and student needs. As a result, teachers need regular opportunities to update their professional knowledge and skills, that is, their opportunities for professional development. Teachers need to be able to take part in activities such as:

- engaging in self-reflection and evaluation
- developing specialized knowledge and skills about many aspects of teaching
- expanding their knowledge base about research, theory, and issues in teaching
- taking on new roles and responsibilities, such as supervisor or mentor teacher, teacher-researcher, or materials writer
- developing collaborative relationships with other teachers

This book provides a survey of current approaches to professional development for language teachers, particularly for those new to teaching or those who seek opportunities for in-service teacher education. A wide variety of approaches are presented and ways of implementing them illustrated, drawing on the authors' experiences of developing and conducting in-service

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teacher programs in many parts of the world. Throughout the book, personal accounts by the authors and by teachers who have experience using activities such as journal writing, peer observation, and teaching portfolios provide compelling examples of how and when such activities can be useful and their advantages and limitations.

This book will therefore serve as a useful source book for teachers, teacher-educators, supervisors, teaching mentors, and others who are interested in carrying out teacher-development activities in their own settings.

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Preface

This book examines a variety of approaches to professional development for language teachers. In most schools and institutions today, language teachers are expected to keep up to date with developments in the field, to regularly review and evaluate their teaching skills, and to take on new teaching assignments according to the changing needs of the institution. Some teachers may also be expected to serve as mentors to new teachers, to plan workshops and other professional activities, to present papers at seminars or conferences, and to write for journals and teaching magazines. Language teaching institutions are also expected to maintain high professional standards, to provide opportunities for their teachers to pursue professional development, and to provide conditions where teachers cooperate to achieve higher levels of learning among their students.

This book is intended as a practical introduction and guide for teachers, administrators, and coordinators who wish to implement a coherent and strategic approach to teacher development. Although the book seeks to provide ideas for practicing teachers, particularly those relatively new to language teaching, we hope that experienced teachers, teacher trainers, and supervisors will find much to interest them as well. In recent years, language teachers in many parts of the world have expressed a growing interest in their own professional development. This is seen in the worldwide interest in such activities as virtual networks for language teachers, action research, journal writing, and portfolios, and the use of these and other activities as a basis for critical reflection on teaching practices. Although a large number of articles and a smaller number of books have been published on these issues, there have been few practical introductions to the field of professional development in language teaching as a whole and the range of activities and procedures that can be used for this purpose. This book seeks to meet this need.

This book examines eleven different procedures that can be used to facilitate professional development in language teaching: workshops, self-monitoring, teacher support groups, journal writing, peer observation, teaching portfolios, analysis of critical incidents, case analysis, peer

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coaching, team teaching, and action research. In addition, the opening chapter presents an overview of the nature of professional development and provides a conceptual framework for the book as a whole.

Each chapter examines, in a straightforward and nontechnical way, one approach to teacher development in language teaching. The goals of each activity are discussed, the methodology of using it, advantages and problems associated with it, and practical examples (in the form of *vignettes* with questions) provided of how teachers in different parts of the world have applied the activity in their own classrooms. The vignettes were obtained through our own contacts with teachers and as a response to invitations on the Internet and at workshops and seminars. The teachers' own names are used, except where anonymity was requested. Reflection questions at the end of each vignette allow readers to consider how to apply the approach in their own teaching contexts and serve as possible topics for investigation. The goal is to help teachers and those responsible for the professional development of teachers to choose activities most relevant to their needs and to familiarize themselves with familiar as well as less familiar approaches to teacher development.

This book reflects our own approaches to teacher learning in language teaching and draws on our combined experience in North America and the Asia Pacific region. We would like to thank the teachers who responded to our requests for examples, to several anonymous reviewers for valuable feedback, and to our editor, Angela Castro, whose suggestions assisted greatly in preparing the manuscript for publication.

Jack C. Richards

Thomas S. C. Farrell