

There have been times in the past ten years of my being an English trainer here in Germany when I've wondered if it is all worthwhile.

Possibly the biggest disadvantage is that the pay isn't great. But you know that. It is not an exaggeration to say that I felt just a tad depressed when I figured out that I earned more in 1990 as a glorified secretary than I do now 15 years later as an English trainer.

Another disadvantage is that teaching English isn't regarded by many as a real career. Just last Sunday I found myself explaining to a fellow American that, well, yes, teaching English is my real job, my career. I am not just doing it as a hobby or until something better comes along.

As if that wasn't enough, there are the moral questions that come up. Is it right to be supporting the cultural imperialism of spreading English around the world? And there are further moral questions about whom you're willing to teach. For example: would you teach employees of a company that sold weapons or profited from the war in Iraq?

Despite all the down sides, this has been the best job I've ever had. The longer I teach, the more I love learning about the many facets of language, communication and intercultural issues. I truly enjoy working with people from various backgrounds and helping them and being more than just their language trainer. It is also hugely satisfying to see a student really learn and improve. Being my own boss has been quite liberating as well.

But after many years what can you do to keep it all fresh? It can get a bit old explaining the present perfect for the 10,000th time only to hear your student say (yet again) "I work here since 1999." What do we do to keep that spark alive and continue to love our jobs enough to put up with the bad pay and annoying questions from people with "real jobs". The answer is that we continue to develop ourselves as well as our craft. The buzz word is: professional development.

Professional development is more than going to workshops from time to time and finding cute new activities to use in your class on Monday. According to Dr. Susanne Duxa [in her article "**Aus- und Fortbildung der Lehrenden**" (In Quentz/ von der Handt 2002: 195-211)] it requires us to give up the idea that we can "arrive." By that she means that there is no point at which our training is finished. Teacher training courses can give us the impression that we just have to learn a certain number of techniques and methodologies and then we too can be "master teachers". We do need to learn about methodology and techniques, but it is not enough. We need to examine our attitudes, assumptions and convictions about what learning is, what teaching is and how people learn other languages. Duxa goes on to say that we need phases of routine and feeling safe and phases of questioning, reflecting and learning. Routine has two sides: on the one hand, it allows us to get better at what we do. On the other hand, it can lead to stagnation. Routine, Duxa describes as giving us "islands of security". She recommends taking a small area to examine and creating a bit of "insecurity" which one should work on systematically until one reaches a new level of security.

How and where can we create these small islands of insecurity? One way is to keep a teaching journal in which you examine some aspect of your teaching over a period of time. For example, one could ask the question "How much time do I really spend speaking to the class? An observer could time it or you could audio or video tape it and time it afterwards. Or perhaps you want to look at how clear your instructions are, whether you are grading language appropriately etc. Making audio or video tapes of your lessons can also be helpful in analyzing the learning that is or isn't going on in your classroom. Feedback from students can be helpful, but sometimes our students like us too much to criticize us.

One thing most of us don't do (voluntarily) is to find a like-minded colleague to give us feedback. It is important to find someone who is a colleague, but not your competition and not your boss. It obviously has to be someone you trust and whose opinion you respect. This peer observation can begin with one session where your colleague simply observes "globally" to get an impression and give general feedback. This can be followed by observations where you assign specific things they should look for. They are a tool you use to help yourself improve, so you need to think carefully beforehand what they should keep their eyes and ears open to.

For ideas as to what you could have them look for see Jim Scrivener's classic "Learning Teaching" (Macmillan). Scrivener suggests different observations tasks including: "What helps people learn?", "Options and Decisions", "Classroom interaction". My favorite is his observation task "Stolen Goods". The task is to "note down several things you would like to 'steal' from this teacher to make part of your own teaching. This may include personal qualities, skills, techniques, activities, atmosphere. You may also want to record why you felt good about the stolen goods. Finally, choose a cute activity or teaching idea you would like to give this teacher in return for your many thefts." Perhaps you can find a peer within **ELTAF** whom you can entrust with the task of helping you stay sane by working on yourself bit by bit.

After many years of teaching, we don't have to become jaded. We can keep our enthusiasm and love of what we do. And we can all sing "Still crazy after all these years", without meaning it literally.