

A story of the personal development of a TESOL teacher Some food for thought.

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As language teaching professionals, we spend a lot of time and energy on our students' skills development. We attend workshops on the latest course book, how to stimulate our classes into learning with laughter, the best way to set up role plays, seminars about phonetics, the advantages of grammar translation versus the communicative approach. We participate in any number of meetings with groups of fellow teachers where we discuss ad infinitum the daily ups and downs of being a freelance / contract / full-time language teacher. Without a doubt, most students benefit exponentially from our efforts on their behalf. In the meantime, who is taking care of *our* development? Who goes the extra mile to ensure *our* skills are being constantly improved and stretched?

Lets face it people, the buck stops with us. **We** are responsible for our self-development. Without a doubt, we certainly gain considerably from attending all the above mentioned events. There's nothing better than sharing a new idea with our students. We all know the thrill of successfully putting a newly discovered activity to the test. And there's certainly nothing better than having a good old chinwag with colleagues over a coffee / glass of wine / happy hour cocktail. All highly therapeutic and re-energising. The question is how long does the energy last?

I wonder how many opportunities to take ourselves in different and new directions are missed because we are on a bit of a treadmill. I've been teaching for over 10 years now. It's a job I fell into without much thought and certainly no plan. My motivation was to get out of the house for a few hours a week! I thoroughly relished the feeling of being an employed person; I was back in the world. I only earned a pittance so didn't have to worry about all those insurances or "Umsatzsteuer Voranmeldungen". Those were the early days. Fast forward 8 years: there I was, feeling quite stressed and often fed up with having to do the weekly round of driving to a dozen different groups each in a different location. I noticed my classes sometimes lacked vitality. Back in the days of ignorant bliss (of grammar rules and methodological theories), I felt I was much more enthusiastic, spontaneous and "sparkly". Some days, it took all my powers of self-persuasion to keep driving through the rush hour traffic on a grey, rainy Monday morning at 7am. In reality, I didn't have any choice but to keep going. The financial "stuff" had developed into a major responsibility.

I got to the point where I felt my accidental profession was controlling me. I had little say about what I could do – just keep my head down, say yes to each new course, irrelevant of what time I had to schlep my sleepy head there or whether I'd get travelling expenses or not. I was resentful and perhaps just a little depressed. It was time to take control and do something positive for myself. I would find a full-time, permanent job – I would become a salaried employee.

OK. That plan didn't work out but the process of exploring other opportunities gave me a new lease of life. I did lots of research and spoke to people. There is more to life than freelancing for other organisations. I got out and about and discovered the joys of being proactive and taking responsibility for my professional self. I tried other jobs within the TESOL branch; "business development", trainer recruitment; I dabbled with super learning. Everything added to my knowledge and broadened my skills set.

Without realising it, I was developing myself. In so doing, I felt refreshed and re-energised. I was still teaching to earn my crust but happily, without so much stress. Working on the whole me had repercussions on my daily business. Taking the time to explore other avenues, seeing what else is "out there" broadened my horizons. I took the proverbial bull by the horns and signed up for a business trainer course with a local Stuttgart-based company. In German! This forced me to clarify my plan, which I'd been reticent about doing, a strange thing in itself. Usually, I spend the first session of any new course focussing on objectives and personal goal-setting for my students. Following some of my own advice led me to successfully completing the 6 month course, signing up to a franchise deal (see below for details) and generally being more responsible for my overall business. Slowly, I'm beginning to see myself as more than an accidental teacher. I'm on my way to becoming a professional business trainer. I had made a conscious effort to do divert some energy from student development into personal development. And it has paid off – I'm developing myself (it's an ongoing process) and my students are benefiting too.

I'm sure I can't be the only person who's "lost their way" over the years. I *know* I'm not the exception when it comes to not taking my own advice. If anyone wants to share their stories or just compare notes, feel free to get in touch. I'm more than happy to share how and where I got (and continue to get) help along the road of my personal development. Indeed, if I have awakened the spark of an interest in personal development, here are some links to sites which I discovered during my research (primarily for women because – well, I'm a woman!!):

<http://www.springboardconsultancy.com/> - for Springboard programmes in Germany, go to: www.keeptraining.de

<http://www.bmbf.de/en/6595.php> the Ministry for Education and Research supports personal development!

<http://www.stadtbranchenbuch.com/stuttgart/C/542.html> - if you're interested in individual coaching. And also: <http://kasiiane-antona.com/portfolio.php>

<http://www.berufswege-fuer-frauen.de/index.html> - ideal for help with self-employment issues and networking with other women. Check out their course offerings, good value for money.

http://www.beff-frauundberuf.de/sem_existenzgr.htm

<http://www.bpw-international.org/BPW-Previous/activities/IDP-training-2008.htm> - participate in the BPW's development programme as a member or non-member