Why should language teachers think about developing themselves during their careers? Some teachers may respond negatively to the notion of any kind of professional development, with the suggestion that they already know it all because they have been teaching for a long time and as such have built up enough knowledge to be able to get through anything in their professional lives (Farrell, 2013). Perhaps all is going very well in classes, students seem to react well to whatever they are given, and all is routine now. Indeed, some teachers may associate professional development with boredom, especially if they have been forced to attend group professional development days in a school or workshops performed by outside experts that have no real meaning for individual teachers. This type of professional development suggests that there is a deficit, or some perceived lack of skill, somewhere in a teacher’s professional repertoire, and that if the teacher engages in professional development, he or she can be trained to compensate for this deficit. Such professional development is usually mandated from above by administrators or government officials, and many teachers do not have much choice about their attendance or the topic that will be presented, because all is decided in a top-down manner. While it is good to have management and administration interested in the professional development of their teachers, this professional development is usually chosen from the management perspective rather than the individual teacher’s perspective. The next section briefly examines professional development from the institution’s and from the individual teacher’s perspectives.
**Reflective Break**

- Who should take responsibility for professional development, the individual teacher or the institution?
- If the institution takes responsibility for their teachers’ professional development, how do you think this will materialize?
- If the individual teacher takes responsibility for his or her own development, how will this materialize?

**Development: Institutional Perspective**

The most common term used for professional development within an institution is “in-service training,” and this is intended to improve some aspect of practice, from the institution’s perspective, so that the institution benefits as a whole. These are usually delivered in the form of workshops, seminars, conferences, or the like. The training could center on the introduction of new teaching methodologies, new technology in the classroom to deliver lessons, or other such improvements. Engaging in in-service teacher development can have positive effects, such as encouraging more collegiality (because, by its very nature, it brings administrators and teachers together to discuss teaching and thus can develop professional relationships) and helping teachers to develop the teaching skills necessary for their particular institution.

Some institutions provide opportunities for the development of their teachers built around the normal activities of day-to-day teaching. This type of development can be called “job-embedded professional development” because it is embedded in the daily work activities of the teachers. According to Wood and Killian (1998), job-embedded professional development is “learning by doing, reflecting on the experience, and then generating and sharing new insights and learning with oneself and others” (p. 52). Job-embedded professional development lasts longer than a workshop or staff development seminar, because it allows a teacher to reflect and apply any new knowledge gained to
his or her particular class while simultaneously getting feedback. So, job-embedded professional development not only takes an institutional perspective but also is relevant to individual teachers’ needs and interests (TESL Ontario, 2011).

**Reflective Break**

- What is your opinion of job-embedded professional development?
- What is your opinion of in-service professional development?
- How should institutions provide professional development opportunities for their teachers?

**Development: Individual Teacher Perspective**

Most teachers are generally interested in developing themselves and keeping up to date with developments in teaching methodologies and other associated skills (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Most teachers I know acknowledge the enormous responsibility they have with trying to provide optimum learning conditions for their students. Indeed, a recent Canadian ESL teacher survey that focused on Ontario instructors’ perspectives on their professional development identified four motives for pursuing professional development activities (Framework for post TESL certificate training project, 2011):

1. Improve teaching
2. Get inspired
3. Try out new strategies
4. Learn from experts in the field

Most respondents indicated that they are very interested in professional development, and they also listed five professional development activities that they perceive would have the greatest impact on their practice:
1. Meet with other instructors to discuss and support each other’s teaching
2. Independent reading related to the field
3. Complete an adult ESL-related course leading to a degree, diploma, or certificate
4. Attend a TESL conference
5. Develop curriculum materials

Some other Ontario ESL instructors were asked to comment on factors they perceived as the most significant barriers to their participation in any form of professional development, and they noted the following (Framework for post TESL certificate training project, 2011).

• The need to travel outside their local area
• Family commitments
• Conflicts with their work schedules
• The requirement to pay fees
• Having no free time outside work hours

Reflective Break

• Comment on the different reasons listed above by Ontario ESL teachers for pursuing professional development. Do you agree with these? Can you add more?

• Comment on the professional activities that the teachers listed that they perceive would have the greatest impact on their practice. Do you agree with these? Can you add more?

• Comment on the teachers’ list of barriers to their professional development. Do you agree with these? Can you add more?

• Why do you think four of the five barriers are time related?
Individual teachers are interested in developing various aspects of their work, such as clarifying and understanding their principles, beliefs, and values, and how these relate to their practice some of which include (many adapted from Richards & Farrell, 2005):

- **Subject-Matter Knowledge**: Increasing knowledge of the disciplinary basis of TESOL—English grammar, discourse analysis, phonology, testing, second language acquisition research, methodology, curriculum development, and the other areas that define the professional knowledge-base of language teaching. (See also Chapter 6 on the ELTD series.)

- **Pedagogical Expertise**: Mastery of new areas of teaching, adding to one’s repertoire of teaching specializations, improving ability to teach different skill areas to learners of different ages and backgrounds.

- **Self-Awareness**: Knowledge of oneself as a teacher and of one’s principles and values, strengths and weakness.

- **Understanding of Learners**: Deepening understanding of learners, learning styles, learners’ problems and difficulties, and ways of making content more accessible to learners.

- **Understanding of Curriculum and Materials**: Deepening one’s understanding of curriculum and curriculum alternatives, of the use and development of instructional materials.

- **Career Advancement**: Acquisition of the knowledge and expertise necessary for personal advancement and promotion, including supervisory and mentoring skills.

- **Language Upgrading**: A fundamental component of a language teacher’s professional competence is his or her proficiency in the language he or she teaches. The proficiency level of a language teacher will in many cases determine the extent to which the teacher is able to use many current teaching methods appropriately and whether the teacher is able to provide a reliable model of target language input for his or her students. There are many ways teachers can improve their language proficiency during their careers. Sometimes in-service courses can be provided that combine methodology with language
Teachers themselves can also decide to improve their language proficiency outside their institutions, using resources available in the outside community (Farrell, 2007).

**Reflective Break**

- Comment on the list of areas above. Do you agree with these?
- Do you think that language upgrading only applies to nonnative speaking teachers of English or to all teachers? Please explain.
- Can you add more to the list?

**Assumptions About Professional Development**

Here are four assumptions about professional development that this book adheres to:

1. Decisions made by teachers need to be based on informed choices (Farrell, 2007). These informed choices give teachers a deeper awareness about teaching and learning so they can thus make appropriate decisions about what will be effective in their classrooms.

2. Systematic reflection (individual, pair, group) by teachers as part of their professional development can result in a wealth of knowledge about teaching (Farrell, 2007). Teachers must collect information about their teaching individually or in collaboration with colleagues so that teaching decisions can be more strategic.

3. Much of what happens in the language classroom remains unknown to the teacher (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). A lesson is a dynamic event in which many things happen at the same time. Teachers cannot hope to be aware of everything that is happening in their classes. This lack of knowledge about what is happening in the classroom can result in teachers making bad decisions about their practice. However, by engaging in
systematic reflections of what is happening in their classrooms, teachers can make more informed decisions based on the evidence they gather. Teachers can thus try and control classroom events and not be controlled by them.

4. Experience is insufficient as a basis for development (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). For example, is 20 years of teaching in the same manner development? Teachers need to constantly reflect on their experiences, remain observant, and avoid falling into the trap of blindly following routine. This reflection keeps their professional development fresh.

**Reflective Break**

- What is your understanding of each assumption listed above?

- What issues do you think remain unknown to the teacher who is teaching a class?

- Why would experience as a teacher be insufficient in itself for development? (After all, those who have more teaching experience would tend to know more than those who have less teaching experience.)

- Can you suggest any further assumptions that would be applicable to your professional development?