

CHAPTER ONE

Teaching in the First Year

Finally, you have made it to a “real” classroom. You may have received a shock, though, because it is different than you had expected, and your teacher education courses may not have prepared you as fully as you would have hoped for this new environment; you are now faced with new students, new colleagues, and new administrators, and you may feel bewildered about what to do. You must now realize that, from this moment onward, your teaching career is totally up to you. You must decide how, when, and, sometimes, what you will teach. So the transition from the protected life in the teacher-training institution to life in a real school classroom (no matter at what level) is not an easy one for most new teachers, and it has often been characterized as a type of reality shock in which the ideals that were formed during teacher training are replaced (sometimes forcefully) by the reality of school life (Veenman, 1984). This being so, teachers in their first years are faced with many challenges that are not always easy to negotiate, and they have special needs and interests that are very different from their more experienced colleagues.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline and discuss some of the challenges English language teachers can experience as they are socialized through different stages of development during their first years as English language teachers and/or “immersion” language teachers, regardless of the context. In this chapter, I hope to raise your level of awareness of the possibility of these problems occurring as a first step to recognizing their origin and, hopefully, allowing for a smooth transition into the profession of English language teacher.

To help highlight some of the challenges that English language teachers face in their first years, when making the transition from the teacher education program to the first-year classroom, I make use of the scenario of a U.S. English language (ESL) teacher (Stacy) as she made this same transition. The scenario is built around a composite of several first-year

2 • Succeeding With English Language Learners

teachers that I have researched in different contexts (ESL/EFL and language immersion contexts) in the past 10 years, and, as such, all the events that I report in this scenario are real and, I hope, instructive for future English language teachers. The scenario is meant to be used as a reflective device so that new teachers can really see their own situations and compare them with what is reported in this chapter.

Exploratory Break 1.1 Teaching in the First Years

- What support do you think you will need during your first years as an ESL/EFL teacher?
- Where do you think you can get this support?
- Do you think the school or institution will give this support? Why? Why not?
- Do you think individuals within the school or institution can support you?
- Who will you get to help you during your first years?
- How can they support you?
- Can you think of any other people or places you can go for support during your first years as a language teacher?

FIRST-YEAR DEVELOPMENT

Different scholars in the field of education have outlined different stages (some call it phases) that teachers go through in their first years. I present two models: the early and influential Fuller and Brown (1975) model of stages of development and the more recent, and more detailed, Maynard and Furlong (1995) model of the stages first-year teachers go through (there are many more models).

Fuller and Brown

Fuller and Brown (1975) talk about a developing sequence of concerns for new teachers. They describe two general stages of development for beginning teachers. The first stage is characterized by survival and mastery and the second stage presents an either/or dichotomy of development: either settling into a state of resistance to change or staying open to adaptation and change of their practice. In the early stage, there are concerns about survival. Teachers' idealized concerns (before entering the classroom) are replaced by concerns about their own survival as teachers.

They are also concerned about control of the class and the content of their instruction. In the later stage, teachers become concerned about their teaching performance, including the limitations and frustrations of the teaching situation. Much later, Fuller and Brown suggest, teachers become more concerned about their students' learning and the impact of their teaching on this learning.

Exploratory Break 1.2 Stages of Development in the First Years

Fuller and Brown (1975) suggest two main stages of development and, within each stage, a continuum of extremes as follows:

Stage I: From survival in the classroom to mastery of the classroom

Survival ————— Mastery

Stage II: From a state of resistance to change to staying open to adaptation

Resistance ————— Adaptation

- Where on the continuum are you placed within each stage?
- How do you know you are in that particular place?
- Describe as best you can your particular stage of development at this moment in your teaching career.

Maynard and Furlong

More recently, Maynard and Furlong (1995, pp. 12–13) have presented a more complex picture (than Fuller and Brown) of beginning teacher development and suggest that teachers go through five stages of development during their first years: early idealism, survival, recognizing difficulties, reaching a plateau, and moving on. These first-year teachers' stages of development are explained as follows.

Early Idealism. This first stage sees the beginning teacher strongly identifying with the students while rejecting the image of the older, cynical teacher. Many beginning teachers are gung ho about getting on with the job for which they were educated, that of teaching language. They tend to skirt staff-room politics, as "this is not the reason they became a teacher." They are fixated on their students' attempts to learn the language.

4 • Succeeding With English Language Learners

Survival. In the survival stage, beginning teachers react to the reality shock of the classroom environment and all that entails. They have just realized that teaching is not easy regardless of the amount of training and education they have received. Beginning teachers now feel a bit overwhelmed by the whole task of teaching; individual lessons become a blur and they cannot manage their classrooms as effectively as they thought possible in Stage I. They cannot follow the progress (or the lack) in each individual student as they had wanted to. In a kind of desperation, beginning teachers want to survive with quick-fix methods to get them through lessons. These quick-fix methods help and provide some respite from the constant demands of teaching.

Recognizing Difficulties. Awareness of the difficulties of teaching, the next stage of development, according to Maynard and Furlong (1995), is when beginning teachers gain more insight into the difficulties of teaching and the causes of these difficulties. They now begin to recognize that teachers are limited in terms of what they can achieve and what they can change in the system and/or their classrooms. They are focused on their performance as a teacher. Now the teacher enters a self-doubt stage and wonders if he or she can make it as a teacher.

Reaching a Plateau. Following the self-doubt stage is the next step, when beginning teachers find themselves better able to cope in different and sometimes difficult situations; they even meet with some success during this stage. They want to establish routines of teaching within their own classrooms. However, they also develop a resistance to trying new approaches and methods so as not to upset the newly developed routines. They are focused more on successful classroom management and not as much on student learning. Success is being achieved (in the beginning teachers' eyes), and they do not want to do anything to upset this status quo that has been so difficult to achieve.

Moving On. The last stage, moving on, is when new teachers begin to focus more on the quality of student learning and the beginning teacher really begins to develop. Maynard and Furlong (1995) suggest that the beginning teacher needs a lot of support at this stage or he or she will not be able to develop further as a result of possible burnout. Maynard and Furlong (pp. 12–13) suggest that if the teacher remains unsupported, “there is a danger of burnout by committed [new] teachers trying to cope alone, or the ‘moving on’ grinding to a halt.”

Exploratory Break 1.3 Stages of Development

Maynard and Furlong (1995, pp. 12–13) outline the following five stages of development teachers go through in their first years:

Early idealism: New teacher identifies with students and rejects older, cynical teachers

Survival: New teacher reacts to reality shock/feels overwhelmed/seeks quick-fix methods

Recognizing difficulties: New teacher becomes more aware of complexity of teaching/realizes teachers *are* limited/enters stage of self-doubt—can I make it as a teacher?

Reaching a plateau: New teacher starts to cope with routines of teaching/develops a resistance to new approaches and methods

Moving on: New teacher begins to focus on quality of student learning

- Do you agree with Maynard and Furlong’s stages of development for a first-year teacher? Why? Why not?
- Which stage of development best describes where you are at the moment?

Part of my reasons for mapping out these different stages of development is to raise your level of awareness of the idea of stages of development—that not all about teaching can be mastered in the first years, but that it is all right; do not be too hard on yourself in these first years. Awareness of these different stages (you may want to consider naming them with different vocabulary that best suits your personal experiences) may help you recognize what you are experiencing in your first years and realize that you are not alone and that these are common experiences of first-year teachers. This awareness may also help you move through the stages smoothly because you realize that you are developing normally as a teacher.

SCENARIO: STACY’S FIRST YEAR

Stacy had enrolled in a one-year teacher education program to certify her as a second language teacher. Stacy already had a BA (English language) degree. The students in this teaching English as a second language (TESOL) certificate program were in a 10-month program in which they were

6 • Succeeding With English Language Learners

exposed to teaching practice and theory classes. On graduating, Stacy obtained a position teaching English as a second language in a U.S. high school. What follows is an account of the stages of development Stacy went through during her first year. Read about Stacy's development during her first year as a language teacher and see what similarities and differences you notice in comparison to your experiences.

STACY'S STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

First Semester

Stacy seems to have gone through several stages during her first semester as a teacher. First, she entered the school with some early idealism characterized by a strong identification with the students, as she really wanted to make a difference in their lives. She really wanted her students, most of whom were recent immigrants to the United States, to succeed in learning English so that they could soon enter mainstream classes. Stacy began to reject many of the older, cynical teachers at the school as the first weeks went by.

Then, as she moved through her first semester as a teacher, she suffered a series of shocks because of the difference between what she had learned in her teacher certification course and the reality of the classroom. In her quest to survive this stage, Stacy sought quick fixes for the discipline problems she was experiencing with one of her classes, but even though these quick fixes seemed to work, she still encountered some difficulties with many of the classes and her communication with her colleagues was next to zero as, she said, they kept their distance.

Stacy next entered a more settled stage, when she slowly began to recognize these difficulties for what they were—their source, their causes, and their result, but she still wondered if she would make it as a teacher. She said that she was bewildered with all the reading and marking of the exam papers as well as all the other duties a teacher has: "I thought I was the 'misfit' in the department and the school." These reflections began toward the end of her first semester and the beginning of the second semester during her first year as a teacher.

Second Semester

During her second semester, Stacy began to cope better with her classes (her teaching methods and classroom management improved). She had established certain routines both inside and outside the classroom, and she was trying to fit into the culture of the school. As noted

previously, Maynard and Furlong (1995) call this stage “reaching a plateau.” After this, Stacy started to pay more attention to the quality of her students’ learning; in other words, she was “moving on,” Maynard and Furlong’s (1995) final stage of development during a teacher’s first year. Or was she? Actually, Stacy realized that she found herself moving back and forth between these stages rather than moving on, and her position usually depended on what she was required to do by the school. Nevertheless, toward the end of the first year, Stacy began to “see” finally why she had wanted to be a teacher in the first place as she started to focus on the quality of her students’ learning. She said that she realized her real reason for being a teacher was to help her students become better users of English so they could enter the mainstream courses. She is now able to reflect on what has influenced this philosophy:

I have a definite philosophy of teaching: I think that all students always come first. If anything will not benefit the students, I will scrap it or play it down.

Exploratory Break 1.4 **Stacy’s First Years of Development**

- Do you think Stacy’s experiences are typical for a first-year language teacher? Why? Why not?
- If you are a teacher during your first year or years, what stage do you think you are at now?
- Did you, or do you think you will, go through all the stages?
- If you are a first-year language teacher at this time, what stage do you think you are at in your development (based on Maynard and Furlong’s stages)?
- What is your philosophy of teaching the English language—ESL, immersion, and so forth?

FIRST YEARS OF SUPPORT

It is quite evident from Stacy’s story that when teachers leave their teacher education or training program and move to real teaching situations in institutions, either university-based language training centers, commercial language schools in an ESL or EFL setting, or regular school

8 • Succeeding With English Language Learners

districts, they more often than not feel isolated because they rarely experience the collegial collaboration (Hargreaves, 1994) that was promoted in the training courses. In many language teacher education courses, teachers are asked to work in small groups to study various methods of instruction and other such tasks; however, when they move to a job, there may be little, if any, peer support.

Most studies on teacher socialization, both in the general education literature and in TESOL, agree on one issue: beginning teachers need support during their first year of teaching. Support may be crucial because beginning teachers have found their first year a period of great anxiety (Johnson, 1996; Veenman, 1984). This support, especially support in the skills of teaching and emotional support, can come from school authorities and from colleagues within the school (Odell & Ferraro, 1992). The contents of this book will give new teachers full support for the skills of teaching ESL and EFL; however, it seems that the single most influential factor in teacher socialization for beginning teachers is their relationships with their colleagues during their first years as teachers (Jordell, 1987).

During their first years, novice teachers have two main jobs: teaching and learning how to teach. During their first years, teachers have special needs and interests that are different from those of their more experienced colleagues (Calderhead, 1992). Calderhead remarked that for beginning teachers, the first year is a fast-paced period in which the novice learns how to adapt to the culture of the school, especially in terms of principles of behavior and common school ideals.

For example, at the level of the “school as workplace,” one of the special needs first-year teachers should consider is the influence of teaching colleagues. This is important, for it may be the case that several different “teacher cultures” exist in one school and that novice teachers are faced with the dilemma of which one to join (Carew & Lightfoot, 1979).

STACY’S SUPPORT

Williams, Prestage, and Bedward (2001) suggest that the culture of any school in which a beginning teacher works exists on a continuum, from a highly individualistic school culture to a collaborative culture where all the teachers are willing to help one another. Stacy found herself in a school that exhibited a culture of individualism. Stacy, not being allowed to observe any colleagues’ classes, manifested this culture of individualism in the school. This was not helped by situational constraints such as

Teaching in the First Year • 9

Stacy's physical isolation from the main staff room, as she was placed in a separate office on the opposite side of the block. There were limited opportunities for sharing because colleagues were not easily visible or accessible since they were not all sharing the same staff room. Stacy's physical location denied her access to opportunities for support.

Lack of communication with her other colleagues was, in fact, the main dilemma Stacy said she faced during her first year: "I didn't talk much with the other teachers because they were always busy and into cliques . . . only two new teachers [from the same teacher-training institution] are here." Stacy continued to talk about the different types of teachers she noted at her school and the feeling that these "cliques" made it hard for her and the other new teachers to adjust during their first year. She explained the different types of teachers in the school:

I see three types of teachers: the group that came together three years before [from the teacher-training institution] . . . I think there are two of them. The older teachers transferred from other schools all stick together. Also, we have the older teachers who have been here a long time and keep to themselves.

Although the teacher-training institute said that she would have a mentor, Stacy noted that after one introduction, she had no more communication with her "mentor." Stacy only met her mentor one time during her first year and this during her first week in the school. She said that she really worries about forming good professional relationships with her colleagues.

Exploratory Break 1.5
Stacy's First Years of Support

- Do you think Stacy's experiences with support (or the lack of it) are typical of a first-year language teacher? Why? Why not?
- What kind of assistance do you think you will need when you start teaching in a school or institution for the first time?
- Who will you ask for this assistance?
- Do you think the school or institution will provide this support for you?
- How can you prepare for this support before you go to the school or institution?

10 • Succeeding With English Language Learners

TEACHING IN THE FIRST YEAR: KEY PLAYERS

Teachers in their first years can help themselves by becoming aware of just which people and organizations are involved in their induction and socialization processes. I see two key players (there are more players, but it is best to focus on the main players) as having a crucial role to play for the successful induction of language teachers into the profession of teachers, and you may be surprised to see that you are one of them: the school that the teacher starts teaching in and the teacher himself or herself.

The School: A Mentor

Each school should appoint a trained mentor to help new teachers through their first years. Of course, this is mandated in many school districts, but that is just the problem—it is mandated but not taken seriously. Many times the mentor is not trained for the position and sees it as an imposition on his or her time, and apart from greeting the new teacher and showing him or her the staff room and how to work the photocopy machine, not much direction is given to new teachers about how to navigate the classroom or how to deal with new colleagues. For example, in Stacy's case, a properly trained mentor could have provided a more sheltered experience during her first semester and year, and she or he could have acted as a bridge between the new and the more established teachers at the school. Research has indicated that beginning teachers who are carefully mentored are more effective teachers in their early years, since they learn from guided practice rather than depending on trial-and-error efforts alone. Additionally, mentored novice teachers tend to leave the teaching profession at a rate lower than nonmentored novices.

TESOL is no different when it comes to mentorship; this may be especially true not only for new teachers but also for teachers new to ESL. For example, in many school districts, teachers are being asked to teach ESL students without any training, and they, too, need guidance about how to deal with these wonderful students from diverse cultures and backgrounds.

So, properly trained ESL mentors are also vital if new teachers are to be guided safely through their first years. Malderez and Bodoczky (1999, p. 4) describe five different roles these ESL mentors can play:

1. They can be models who inspire and demonstrate.
2. They can be acculturators who show mentees the ropes.

Teaching in the First Year • 11

3. They can be sponsors who introduce the mentees to the “right people.”
4. They can be supporters who are there to act as sounding boards, should mentees need to let off steam.
5. They can be educators who act as sounding boards for the articulation of ideas to help new teachers achieve professional learning objectives.

I think these five roles can be a wonderful blueprint for principals and teacher educators who are involved in setting up mentorship programs, and they are also good guidelines for new teachers about the role of a mentor. New teachers can go through this list and ask their mentors to fulfill these roles.

**Exploratory Break 1.6
Mentors**

- Have you had any experiences with a mentor during your first years as a language teacher? Describe these experiences.
- Can you think of any other roles a mentor of language teachers should play besides Malderez and Bodoczky's (1999) five roles?
- Which of Malderez and Bodoczky's five roles that mentors can play did your mentor exhibit?
- Did your mentor exhibit any other roles?

Teaching Hours

Teachers in their first year should have fewer teaching hours than their more experienced colleagues in order to give them time to adjust to the realities of the job. This sounds reasonable, but principals often see new teachers with lots of energy as a resource to be used to the maximum immediately because, many times, the school they are appointed to has been undersupplied with teachers. It could be that in some schools, new teachers' skills are taken for granted and thus they are given full responsibilities from the first day of work. Stacy made a sudden jump from 16 periods to 35 periods, which was a real shock for her. This “shock” could destabilize already-anxious new teachers and have adverse effects well beyond their first year of teaching. These teachers can end up in such stressed-out states that they abandon the profession after only a short

12 • Succeeding With English Language Learners

period of time (Varah, Theune, & Parker, 1986). Not only did Stacy have this increased teaching load, but she also had other duties that included marking exam papers and getting involved in extracurricular activities after school hours with the students. It is interesting that the principal did not find this a problem and remarked that new teachers have to “learn how to work smart.” Nevertheless, Stacy felt that sometimes she did not have time to understand what she was doing. So, special timetable arrangements (at least during the first semester) should be made for new teachers in order to give them time to adjust to school life. New teachers cannot do much about this, but you could try to make a case for why you need the extra time to adjust.

Exploratory Break 1.7 Teaching Load

- Do you think Stacy had too many teaching hours and classes during her first year as a teacher? Why? Why not?
- Do you think first-year teachers should have fewer hours than more experienced teachers? Why? Why not?
- How many hours do you think first-year teachers should be expected to teach each week?
- How many hours a week do you expect to teach during your first year as a teacher?
- How would you justify (to the school head or principal) teaching fewer hours during your first year on the job? What reasons or arguments would you present to the school head or principal to justify teaching fewer hours?
- What would you do during the time off?

Nature of Classes

Connected to the teaching load is the nature, or type, of classes a new teacher is assigned to teach. Stacy was given many lower-proficiency classes in English language to teach. This responsibility placed a heavy burden on Stacy, because she had to deal not only with her students' underachieving in English, but also with their behavioral problems. It may be that these extra problems for new teachers could overload their psychological adjustment to the school. “Difficult” classes should only be given to beginning teachers under the guidance of a mentor or avoided

altogether during the first year (see Chapter 3 on classroom management for more discussion on discipline).

Exploratory Break 1.8 Nature of Classes During the First Years

- Do you think first-year teachers should be given higher-level (in terms of language proficiency) classes only? Why? Why not?
- Do you think first-year teachers should be asked to teach lower-level (in terms of language proficiency) classes only? Why? Why not?
- Do you think first-year teachers should be asked to teach all levels of classes? Why? Why not?

The New Teacher

The beginning teacher himself or herself plays a vital role (some may say the beginning teacher has more responsibility than the other major players) in recognizing the reality of life in a school and, as such, should remain open to advice from the school personnel (the principal, mentor, and senior teachers). Lortie (1975) has best characterized the relationships that Stacy seems to have experienced with her colleagues during her first year: “live and let live, and help when asked” (p. 195). An important question is, did Stacy ask for guidance or was she waiting to be told what to do? Stacy may have given up too early, or easily, on her senior colleagues since they may have been burdened with their own heavy teaching loads. It may have been wiser for Stacy to become more assertive and ask for advice and assistance from her senior colleagues rather than waiting for them to intervene.

For example, beginning teachers like Stacy could become more proactive by drawing up a list of questions about the school and requirements for beginning teachers before they enter the school. These questions may include (but are not limited to) the following:

School

What is the organization of the school? Do I have a copy of the staff handbook, school rules, and any other school brochures? Who are the nonteaching staff members (clerical, computer and science technicians, librarians, and photocopy helpers) that I can ask for assistance?

14 • Succeeding With English Language Learners

Organization

Whom do I report directly to? Does the school have an induction program for beginning or new teachers? Who is my mentor? How often should I meet my mentor? What are my duties during recess, lunch, and after school? Do I have extracurricular activities? Do I have to teach remedial classes? What is my timetable? Where are my classrooms?

Subject

What classes will I be teaching and is there a written syllabus for each class? What are the required textbooks? What are the schemes of work I need to follow? How do I do assessment and record keeping?

Students

What proficiency levels are the students at and what English language skills have they attained? Who taught them previously and can I talk to that person? How should I counsel and/or discipline my pupils?

Exploratory Break 1.9 Helping Yourself

Some of these questions may seem obvious, but by posing and attempting to get answers to them, beginning teachers can develop greater awareness for their own professional socialization and take more explicit responsibility for their own professional development. Try to get answers to these questions.

- Can you think of other questions first-year language teachers can ask to better prepare for their first years as a language teacher?

Of course there are other important players in the induction of new teachers, such as the teacher-training program or institution that the teacher has just graduated from and other agencies (such as the Ministry of Education); however, different countries and institutions may have different organizations controlling the selection and placement of teachers. Just because teachers have graduated from an institution, it does not mean that teacher educators should relinquish their responsibilities for ensuring a successful transition for the first-year teacher.

CHAPTER REFLECTION

It is impossible to predict what teaching situations newly qualified English language teachers may find themselves in as the contexts and situations vary from university-based language institutes, to elementary and secondary schools (as in the case study example), to private institutes. As Bullough and Baughman (1993) gladly point out,

Thankfully, the process of becoming a teacher will always remain wonderfully mysterious despite the best efforts of researchers to achieve control, just as the ends of education inevitably will remain unpredictable, a condition for which we should be grateful. (p. 93)

Nevertheless, teachers of English language in their first years can do much to improve their chances of having a successful transition from the teacher education institution by preparing realistically for what they are about to face in real second language classrooms.