ELT Professionals Prepare for Retirement

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Abstract If we see the 1960s as the time when the term 'applied linguistics' was coined, then the pioneers associated in this field have now mostly retired. Some have spent the years post full-time employment doing activities that build on their professional lives while a very few have said they want nothing more to do with that aspect of their life. In this chapter we start by investigating the professional lives of some renowned applied linguists.

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1 Introduction

There has recently been some interest in recording the life journeys of applied linguists, with an emphasis on how their careers began and then changed over time. Ellis (2016) has contributions from people whose choice of titles for their chapters show a reflection on the past: "looking back" (Charles Anderson), "it was always about…" (Dana Ferris) and "the road travelled" (Susan Gass). The stories collected by Haworth and Craig (2016) have a similarly reflective tone as they report on the start and the progress of people's careers, but not on their preparation for the next stage; the word 'retirement' seems to be the elephant in the room. As the co-author of a book on supporting English language teachers' professional development (Smith & Lewis, 2018) one of us must plead guilty to the same omission. We mention ways of mentoring teachers at many stages of their careers but avoid the topic of how these teachers might be guided towards their life after full-time employment.

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This chapter is offered by two people at different life stages: one who is well into her retirement and the other who is decades away from it. Is it morbid, as some have said, to start thinking of retirement when one is still leading a full and satisfying professional life? Or, as others suggest, is it just as realistic as preparing to leave school and choosing a line of study or a career? The suggestions we offer here are a combination of our own experiences, of observation of the post-life worlds of others and of what few hints we can gather from the literature on people's careers. They apply to both school- and university-based language teachers.

Here is a reflection from one of us.

As I approached retirement there was no shortage of advice from those a decade ahead of me, some of it contradictory.

Make sure you find a new interest.

Why not gradually wind down instead of suddenly retiring?

Don't try and hang on to the past.

Keep doing the things you are good at.

And so on. When I initiated conversations with them I was less interested in what they were currently doing than in how they decided what to do. One tangible thing I did in my last few months as a university lecturer was to start to fill an exercise book with ideas under headings like these:

new activities/activities from my old life

focus on myself/focus on others

long-term ideas/one-off ideas

physical/ mental/emotional/spiritual

suggestions from others/my own ideas

The more I thought about these headings, the more I found the metaphor of a patchwork quilt appealing. My life would be like that quilt: varied and beautiful, made up of many small parts rather than with one single focus.

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2 What Is Retirement?

In the past, this question was relatively easy to answer. For most people round the world it would be the—mostly immediate—transition from working (usually full-time) to not working anymore at all, often at a government-mandated age. This is still

a common perception, as witnessed by assumptions about older staff and the kinds of questions they get about their work/life situation as their hair turns grey. In recent decades, however, a much wider range of options for retirement have emerged. It is not uncommon now to find people who:

- Work years past the local retirement age.
- Gradually reduce their work hours (either before or after the general retirement age—sometimes referred to as 'pre-tiring').
- Change their professional roles (e.g., from being a tenured staff to becoming a casual lecturer).
- Do not retire at all.
- Move from employment to becoming self-employed (for example, working as an educational consultant).

These developments are the result of an aging population, better healthcare (many healthy older people are able to work for longer than before) and also of changes in the perceptions of what 'work' should look like. More flexible modes of working (including working part-time, having multiple jobs, working online, and so on) have emerged in many countries, and this has resulted in a less strict view of what kinds of work people can and should engage in at what age.

This extends to the phenomenon of 'mini-retirements', or the withdrawing from regular work for an extended period of time (usually anywhere from three months to three years) at any point in one's career. As employers are more understanding of gaps in people's CVs, this is becoming more common. In a way this is similar to the university sabbatical (which many language teachers do not have access to) but without the expectation of professional development and research outputs. One of us has taken three of these so far and they have been extremely fulfilling—if at times financially and personally challenging. Timothy Ferriss, in his extremely popular book 'The 4-Hour Workweek' (2007), provides many ideas for this type of break. Although much of his writing is rather sensationalist,[1] there are some useful suggestions.

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3 How to Plan for Retirement

One question people sometimes raise is whether or not one should plan for retirement versus waiting to see what opportunities emerge. As we know, plans do not always materialise, even in the earlier years. Unexpected events can be sad, such as illness or the loss of people who have been an important part of our lives, but more positively they can enrich our lives, as in the birth of children or the opening of opportunities

[1]The New Rich aim(s) to distribute "mini retirements" throughout life instead of hoarding the recovery and enjoyment for the fool's gold of retirement. By working only when you are most effective, life is both more productive and more enjoyable. It's the perfect example of having your cake and eating it too' (p. 32).

engineered by others. Some would argue, philosophically, that it is possible to prepare for the unexpected such as putting financial provisions in place.

Assuming that thinking of ways to plan is the reason why you are still reading, let's consider who might be part of your planning. People who have already retired from language teaching come to mind as one source. One question to ask these people is "What do you do in retirement?" but another, as mentioned above, could be "How did you decide what to do?" As well as directly questioning these people you could observe their lives and note any aspects which you would like to imitate (or of course avoid).

Your questions need not be limited to other language teachers; people who have been involved in quite different work may also have helpful insights. One idea that could be worth exploring includes the extent to which you want to keep in touch with former colleagues. Will you maintain membership of professional organisations? Would monthly lunches be a good idea? Networking continues to be important to many people. What fresh collegiality might be waiting either in other parts of your own country or through international contacts?

Considerations like these will help you clarify your aims for retirement and this in turn will help to decide what (if any) preparations you may need to make. Doing this with one or more colleagues at the same stage of life could be a starting point. You could share ideas in response to sentence-starters like these:

- One thing I've always wished I had time for is….
- My biggest worry about retirement is….
- To me the best thing about retirement will be…
- When I want to retire I want to develop myself as…

A useful term to consider here is 'transitioning'. Rather than seeing retirement as a sharp break from one stage to the next (even if at a practical level it may be like this), the idea of a transition brings to mind a process, one that can be given its due time and commitment. The above conversations will help you consider the different stages during that process.

The elephant in the room is often the difference between those who have made financial provision for their retirement and those who find themselves with uncomfortably low incomes. Some countries are more generous to their retirees than others. For instance, in the city where we live there is free transport after 9 a.m. on buses, trains and ferries for everyone 65 years and over, regardless of their current income. If you don't find it helpful to be reminded that in some countries the elderly have to live on a pittance and yet may be happy, then pre-retirement is the time to start planning. Andrew Hallam's article 'The TESOL Teacher's Nine Steps to Financial Freedom' (2011) is a useful starting point.

Many language teachers work in a range of countries and for them tax and pension planning can be complicated. As every situation is unique our recommendation is to seek advice and do it early. There are stories of teachers having lost access to government or professional body pension scheme payouts because they were overseas too long, for example.

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4 Transferable Skills for Retirement

Part of the planning process is to think about which aspects of our life's profession are transferable to fresh activities and, on the other hand, what skills or knowledge that we have never had might be worth working on. This section considers the first category.

The skills of teaching, and specifically language teaching, lend themselves to many interesting applications. One-to-one tutoring of new immigrants comes to mind, either voluntarily or for payment. At the voluntary end of the scale one example is organisations that work with refugees who are always looking for volunteers. (Be ready to be asked to help with their tutor training sessions once they know you were a teacher!) For paid tutoring many immigrant families for whom money is not a problem may be looking for someone to coach their school-aged children. Be ready too for less obvious openings for one's teaching skills, such as having official input into the lives of young children. Some schools are delighted to have volunteers willing to make regular commitments with classes or individuals. I have found myself invited along to be interviewed by a class of young children who were studying 'life long ago', which turned out to include my own lifetime. In another case the invitation was to conduct a short weekly session on how the values spelled out in the National Curriculum could translate into the children's everyday activities.

As well as doing the teaching oneself there is also the role of mentoring others. Mentoring can be a satisfying way of passing on a lifetime's experience. In a recent book (Smith & Lewis, 2018) we outlined a number of specific roles including classroom observation followed by feedback, mentoring groups and carrying out joint research projects. If that does not fill all one's available time, then there is always the idea of running workshops for new mentors.

Then there is the role of public speaking, which many language teachers excel at. For the first few years post full-time work this may include invitations to speak at professional conferences, but professionally-related contexts are only one possibility. From my own experience speaking skills can also lead to requests to deliver eulogies at funerals, or congratulatory words at 21st and weddings. You will also be in demand for introducing visiting speakers at a variety of events.

Being able to work with a wide range of stakeholders (parents, colleagues, learners, administrators, community representatives) and organise complex environments are part of a teacher's skill-set that is much sought-after and that can be transferred to a wide range of community leadership roles, such as in management, volunteering, local or regional council work and so on.

Research skills can continue to be used, either for one's own projects or as a co-writer with others still in the workforce. This latter role is stimulating for both parties. The one still working has the benefit of someone else's lifetime of experience while the older person is kept up-to-date with professional trends.

As teachers we have also had experience with writing. Of course, we may be relieved to have some of our writing responsibilities removed. Who misses the report-writing that is part of the secondary teacher's job or the writing up of minutes from

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departmental meetings at the university? More positively there are forms of writing which make life more stimulating, book reviewing being one of them. Receiving (complimentary!) new books to review for a journal has the bonus of updating one's professional knowledge for some of the talks and teaching already mentioned. In addition, being able to choose the types of project and writing to take on—as well as the amount of time to be dedicated to them—may mean that you will finally be able to tackle a book project or engage in a different style of writing.

5 Self-Employment

The preceding section talked mostly about the types of activity teachers would engage in *pro bono* (although some may be paid). A more structured approach to continuing professional and academic work is to offer one's services as a form of self-employment. Many teachers accumulate a wide range of experiences and skills throughout their lifetimes, including working in different countries and in different roles. This makes them valued for their ability to review curricula, do external examining, help with developing (or providing feedback) on departmental strategic plans, design professional development programmes, and so on. Many institutions will benefit from someone who has the flexibility to travel and spend a few days on-site. Such forms of consultancy offer the benefit that you can choose which projects to take on, while generating some income.

As employers become more lenient with staff engaging in outside work, increasingly people run consultancies or small companies alongside their jobs. These can be an excellent way to prepare oneself for retirement. The decision to take on additional work requires some preparation. There will be tax and financial implications, employer permission to seek, administrative requirements and so on. There are many good resources that readers can use to help them prepare for these aspects. As for the professional skills needed to run a small business, it is important to consider these well before retirement. If your aim is to offer professional development, clearly you will need experience—ideally in a range of contexts—as well as building up your reputation and CV to be able to do so. Similarly, if you want to write a book, consider developing your writing skills with shorter texts (e.g., articles).

6 Concluding Thoughts

Experience suggests a balance (but not a distinction) between activities that could be labelled 'giving' and those that emphasise 'receiving' and between long-term versus once off activities.

Finally, as with the rest of life we know that there is always a balance to be found between the professional, the social and the personal. We have aimed to show throughout this chapter a number of ways of making retirement a rich time. There

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are others we haven't mentioned, such as the fact that many TESOL teachers are multilingual, a skill that opens up even more doors. We conclude with some questions to consider either by yourself or in a group setting.

7 Discussion Questions

1. As you read this chapter did you think of some fresh ideas not mentioned here?
2. Rank some factors in the order of their importance for you, such as
   - Financial considerations.
   - Anti-boredom.
   - Taking on new roles.
3. Who, in your current circles, could be helpful pre-retirement mentors?

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