CHAPTER 1

The Early Career Years

Preamble

Damien (a pseudonym), a qualified teacher of English as a foreign language (EFL) located in South America, decided to leave the teaching profession at the end of his fifth year (Farrell, 2022). His last year was at the start of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 when he suddenly had to pivot to online teaching platforms like most other English as a second language ESL/EFL teachers around the globe.[1] When Damien moved to online teaching via Zoom, he also volunteered to take part in a reflective practice project using the same reflective framework used throughout this book (see Chapter 2 for more details). He said that he "was excited … about this opportunity" because the concept of reflective practice was "a new skill for him to learn" (Farrell, 2022, p. 26). During his reflections on his philosophy, principles, theory, and practice, and his critical reflections beyond practice, common themes emerged across all five stages of the framework, such as the importance of establishing rapport with students, his focus on students' needs, his sense of personal responsibility to deliver a positive learning experience wherein his students learn successfully, and his definition of his role as a teacher as being one who finds appropriate strategies to transmit knowledge so that others understand. Indeed, Damien's journey through the five stages of the framework revealed a primarily cohesive narrative, as indicated through his reflections on his philosophy, principles, and theory, and his critical reflection and as executed in his classroom practices. I sent Damien the results of each stage of his reflections, and on reading these he noted how useful he found the framework as a whole to reflect on his practice: "It was useful to me to reflect on each of the stages as it helps me become more aware and selective of what

[1] Please note the terms EFL and ESL for teachers can be interpreted differently in different parts of the world, but I use ESL to describe the teachers in this study because in the context of Canada this is the norm.

I do in the class every day … it is great to see all the pieces together as part of a big jigsaw puzzle" (Farrell, 2022, p. 41).

Hence, from my perspective as a facilitator for his reflections, all seemed to be going well for Damien as an excellent EFL teacher at the end of his fifth year of teaching, notwithstanding his sudden pivot to online teaching at the beginning of the pandemic. Then, a few weeks after his reflective journey, I was informed by his colleague that Damien had quit teaching (see Farrell, 2022 for details on his reflections in all five stages) without giving any specific reasons to any of his colleagues. I attempted to reach out to him but did not receive any replies to my messages.

Introduction

The preamble outlines my first real experience of an EFL teacher quitting teaching after five years and after undertaking a reflective journey using the five-stage framework for reflecting on practice, even though his reflections seemed to indicate that he was a high-quality teacher. Subsequently, I began to wonder whether Damien's was a rash individual decision or one that had developed over the previous four years. On reexamining his reflections, I began to realize that Damien's decision to leave the profession may not have been an instant or rash decision. Indeed, it seems that two particular concerns had been accumulating over the previous four years and continued to bother him in his fifth year. The first was the growing realization that his personal ethics were coming more and more into conflict with the more commercial aspects of language education that he was a part of within his institution. He mentioned that the commercial approach involved the fees students were charged to study and that these "offended" him and made him "angry" because the students were being exploited for financial reasons. The second concern that "frustrated" Damien centered on his perception of a lack of opportunity for him to advance within the institution. For example, in his critical reflections beyond practice, he noted that he had been passed over for promotion a few times in the previous four years even though he thought he was more than qualified for it. In the end, Damien's struggle to negotiate the dissonance between his personal ethics and his perceptions of the institution's business ethics, as well as his lack of personal advancement, led him to quit teaching. I cannot say for sure why Damien quit teaching altogether, but the idea that teacher attrition is a process rather than a fixed, rash decision concurs with research in general education that suggests that the decision of early

career teachers (ECTs) to quit may well begin in the early career years, long before ECTs actually leave teaching (Clandinin et al., 2015).

Thus began my initial reason(s) for wanting to explore and examine the actual lived experiences of early career ESL/EFL teachers and why some stay while others, like Damien, who could be considered among the "best and brightest" (Cooper, 2000), leave. Indeed, in a more recent article Gross (2023) noted that not many university students want to become teachers anymore and then suggested that they cannot be blamed for such a decision given the sorry state of the teaching profession. Within TESOL, we have heard many similar anecdotes about ECTs who are not happy about their experiences, with many deciding to leave before the end of their fifth year or before. However, because this information is mostly anecdotal, we still do not have any solid research or details on the actual lived experiences of early career ESL teachers to enable us to discuss teacher attrition or retention. I attempt to provide such evidence in the pages that follow throughout this book.

This book outlines and discusses the lived experiences of five early career ESL teachers in Ontario, Canada, through the lens of reflective practice. In addition, I compare their results to the reflections of two more experienced ESL teachers, one in her seventh year and another in her tenth year, to learn why they stayed beyond their early career years. By understanding which adaptation challenges exist and are considered hazardous for early career ESL teachers' well-being and retention, it may be possible to provide teachers with more manageable strategies and the support they need, thereby encouraging them to stay in the profession. This first chapter examines what the research on the early career teaching years says. It then introduces and provides details on the main aims of the book in terms of early career ESL teachers and teacher retention (i.e., to try to get high-quality teachers such as Damien to stay in the profession). It also outlines each chapter of the book.

Reflective Break

- Why did you decide to become a teacher?
- Are you still happy with your decision to become an ESL teacher?
- Why do you think early career teachers may consider leaving the teaching profession?
- Have you ever thought about leaving teaching?
- If yes to the above question, what challenges did/do you face that would make you consider leaving the profession?

- What would be the main reasons for an ESL teacher to remain in the profession?
- Why do you remain in the ESL teaching profession?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of being an early career ESL teacher?

What the Research Says

Becoming a teacher is a gradual process that often includes some kind of initial teacher education, an initiation/socialization transition phase within the first year of teaching, followed by continuing professional learning for the ECTs as they shift into the profession fully (European Commission et al., 2021). During their teacher education programs, learner teachers obtain knowledge (both content and pedagogy) that teacher-educators have decided is important and necessary for ECTs to use if they are to become effective teachers throughout their careers. The assumption is that some of the knowledge they obtain can be useful once they begin in their early years of teaching in their first years. While this may be true to some extent, there is evidence that weaknesses connected to the type of knowledge that teacher education programs provide render it less relevant to the classroom and school lived experiences that ECTs face (Laats, 2020). For example, the relevance of many of these programs has been questioned because they follow a "learn-the-theory-and-then-apply-it model" (Yan & He, 2010, p. 60), which is considered flawed because such approaches are not grounded in the real-life experiences of novice ESL teachers (Farrell, 2017a; 2021a). This is important for teacher retention because, as Ingersoll et al. (2014) have observed, teachers who are trained in preparation programs that have a focus on applied teaching skills (i.e., practical experience, feedback, and classroom observation) are less likely to leave the profession after their first years of teaching than those who are trained in more theoretically focused programs.

However, this book is about the actual lived experiences of early career ESL teachers beyond their teacher education programs, and not what the content of initial teacher education programs should be (I have already written in some detail about that topic in Farrell, 2017a; 2021a). Such teachers have been classified differently in the literature as ECTs (Buchanan et al., 2013; Clandinin et al., 2015), newly qualified teachers (NQTs) (Perryman & Calvert, 2020), and beginning teachers (BTs) (Thomas et al., 2019). Throughout this book, I use the term ECTs to refer to teachers in their

first five years in the profession. The reason I highlight the first five years is because studies reveal that as many as 40 percent of teachers leave during that period (Kutsyuruba et al., 2022). I also examine the reflections of two other ESL teachers in their seventh and tenth years in order to compare and contrast their experiences with those of the other five teachers, because they decided to stay in the profession.

Reflective Break

- What type of teacher education program did you attend and why?
- What specific courses did you take and why?
- Did you have any practice teaching (practicum) experience?
- Do you think you were adequately prepared in your teacher preparation program for the transition to your first year of teaching?
- Do you think you were adequately prepared for the first five years (the early career years) of teaching?
- Why do you think that nearly 40 percent of teachers leave during the first five years of teaching?

Transitioning into the First Year

Many novice teachers are both nervous and excited when they are about to enter their own classrooms for the first time and many have been termed "spark-plug go-getters" (Kaufmann & Ring, 2011, p. 52), eager to begin to fulfill their mission to make a difference in their students' lives (Day, 2007). At this very early stage, most teachers in their first year are passionate about their new career as a teacher because they feel they have something to offer in terms of approach, energy, and new methods (Meirink et al., 2020). However, the transition from the teacher preparation program to the first year of teaching can be a praxis shock (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002), and a real cultural shock (Wideen et al., 1998). For many teachers, unfortunately, there can also be a sudden "collapse of the missionary ideals" formed during their teacher education course, which are replaced "by the harsh and rude reality of classroom life" (Veenman, 1984, p. 143), one that is different from the protected environment many experience during their practicum. Many novice teachers report from the very start of their new career that they feel overwhelmed because they are expected to do everything an experienced teacher does from the get-go. As Redman (2006, p. xii) has pointed out, "The [first year] teacher is responsible for the nuts and bolts of managing

the classroom, developing effective lesson plans … addressing the standards, taking roll … collaborating with colleagues. The list is endless."

However, unlike most of their more experienced colleagues, first-year teachers have not yet built up the repertoire of skills required to accomplish all of this and as such face enormous immediate challenges and are immediately consigned to a "sink or swim" process (Varah et al., 1986), where they experience a "rollercoaster ride" of emotions (Mansfield et al., 2014). In addition, language teaching itself is different from teaching other subjects, because the content (ESL) is also the medium of instruction, thus providing even more challenges for novice teachers as content and instruction are interlocked (Artigliere & Baecher, 2017; Farrell, 2016; 2017a). The shock of transitioning into the real workplace is also common in many other professions, such as medicine (Flynn & Hekelman, 1993), engineering (Riordan & Goodman, 2007), and social work (O'Connor & Dalgleish, 1986).

Thus, learner ESL teachers who make the transition from their teacher education programs to the real classroom will inevitably suffer some "shocks" along the way; however, the real issue is that many are left to cope on their own without much guidance (Johnson et al., 2014) or support (Higginbotham, 2019). As their first-year teaching progresses, the ideals that they had formed during their teacher education program are washed away (Freeman, 1994) by this new reality, and many report having a lost at sea experience (Flores & Day, 2006), which can end for some novices in ultimately quitting the profession.

Reflective Break

- What was your transition year (your first year) from your teacher education program like for you?
- Did you have an induction program? If yes, what did it consist of?
- Were you assigned a mentor? If yes, what were your experiences with the mentor?
- Other than a mentor, did you receive support from other teachers or school staff?
- Did you ever think of quitting after (or during) this first year? If yes, why? If not, why not?

Beyond the First Year

Of teachers who *do* survive their first year, research has indicated that their "transition traumas" can have serious repercussions on their future commitment to the profession during the next four crucial early years because

of built-up feelings of stress, anxiety, alienation, and self-doubt (Lindqvist et al., 2014). If the differences between their expectations and the reality of the first year are great (i.e., if they are adversely affected by the transfer) then ECTs will really struggle during this period, which in turn will adversely affect their teaching, and possibly lead to attrition in the next four crucial years (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). In fact, alarming statistics for ECT attrition have been reported worldwide, with between 30 percent and 40 percent of ECTs teaching general subjects leaving the profession within five years in the US (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014), the UK (Department for Education, 2019), Chile (Ávalos & Valenzuela, 2016), and Belgium (Dupriez et al., 2016). While Ingersoll and Strong (2011) has suggested that a certain level of attrition within the profession is a reality, the huge loss of ECTs is damaging to everyone concerned but mostly it is detrimental to student learning (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2017). So, an important question is why do so many ECTs ultimately leave the teaching profession?

Teacher attrition can be attributed to multiple factors, with the two most reported being inadequate teacher preparation for first-year teachers and a lack of support for ECTs (Buchanan et al., 2013; Clandinin et al., 2015; Harfitt, 2015; Kidd et al., 2015; Lindqvist et al., 2014; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). For ECTs who quit teaching after their first year, many reported feeling un(der)prepared to teach and had issues with their teacher preparation, feeling the program content did not match their lived experiences in real classrooms, in addition to a lack of support mentioned earlier (Buchanan et al., 2013; Clandinin et al., 2015; Harfitt, 2015; Lindqvist et al., 2014). Thus, the first important "resource" in terms of providing support for ECTs is adequate preparation during their teacher education programs (Farrell, 2017a; 2021a). Indeed, research has suggested that ECTs who perceive that they have been well-prepared for the realities of life in a school maintain that they feel less likely to leave the profession because of such initial support (Kelly et al., 2019).

In addition, a lack of support was the main reason many ECTs reported as their main reason for leaving the teaching profession. For example, Perryman and Calvert (2020) reported that several ECTs who left the profession did so because of their discontent with senior management, poor administration, and a lack of management support. As one ECT in their third year put it: "[What] drives teachers away from the profession … is the lack of support and trust from management [and] pressure of constant tests, assessments, and targets. Teachers need to be trusted more" (Perryman & Calvert, 2020, p. 16). Another fifth-year ECT

reported: "Very poor and unsupportive line management is by far the worst aspect of my job. The crippling workload is also killing me but [it] would be more manageable if I was thanked and appreciated and valued" (Perryman & Calvert, 2020, p. 15).

This last statement is interesting for two reasons: (1) It highlights the two most reported reasons for leaving the teaching profession; and (2) because it displays a sort of hierarchy for this teacher where both the work environment and early career support influence the decision to stay or leave, but where one holds more weight than the other – the teacher would be willing to compromise on the latter if the former were improved. While a lack of support appears to hold the largest amount of influence for this ECT, the "crippling workload" that they refer to is a continued source of agony for many others. As Williams et al. (2001) note, the culture of any school in which a beginning teacher works exists on a continuum from highly individualistic school culture to a collaborative culture where all the teachers are willing to help one another. However, research has indicated that schools with more collaborative cultures, as well as supportive school leadership, are more successful in retaining ECTs (Long et al., 2012; Miller et al., 2020; Rothmann & Fouché, 2018).

Reflective Break

- How did you transition from your first year of teaching into your early career years?
- What kind of support did you have?
- If you are still in your first year of teaching, what kind of support do you think you will need? How will you go about getting it?

Aim of the Book

The preceding review of literature related to the early career teaching years primarily focused on the period before the onset of the recent worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. During this pandemic, a lot changed in the lives of teachers, be they novice or experienced. In addition to the literature review's analysis of why early career teachers leave the profession outlined above, the pandemic has worsened an already difficult situation regarding teacher attrition. As Thompson (2021) put it, the "pandemic has generally exacerbated already evident tensions and preexisting inequalities in educational systems … [and] failed to trigger structural improvements such as investment, support, and better conditions for professional educators

across levels of education" (pp. 16–17). In fact, a survey of teachers in the US found that 91 percent of all teachers (not just ECTs) reported that pandemic-related stress and burnout were a serious concern for them, and as a result, many are now considering leaving the teaching profession (Rainey, 2022). The reflective practice project reported in this book started before COVID-19, with some of the teachers teaching face-to-face (Peter, Rachel, Sarah); all the others had to pivot quickly to online platforms at the start of the pandemic and thus faced even more challenges than would normally be expected (and reported in the literature review) during their early career years. As the literature review suggests, the pathway through the early career years was already very challenging, with high attrition rates (50 percent, according to OECD, 2018), so it becomes even more vital to learn more about the lived experiences of ECTs given the extra stresses and challenges caused by the pandemic on their overall well-being (Gregersen et al., 2020; Mercer, 2021; Miller & Gkonou, 2018).

Yet within the field of TESOL, few (if any) longitudinal studies exist on the lived experiences of early career language teachers, either face-to-face or online. A recent exception, but not longitudinal, focused through interviews on teacher attrition of fourteen early career foreign language teachers in two contexts (Austria and the UK) (Sulis et al., 2022). They reported that intrapersonal, societal, and contextual factors related to teacher well-being contributed to shaping ECTs' decisions to remain in or leave the profession. More importantly for the study reported on in the current volume, Sulis et Al. (2022) also noted that the ECTs only became more aware of the realities of their teaching through a process of self-reflection. However, they did not elaborate on exactly how early career foreign language teachers should engage in such self-reflection or how reflective practice in general can be operationalized. Indeed, this is a real weakness with such a comment related to encouraging learner language teachers to engage in reflective practice without showing them how to do it, and this weakness is all too common in language teacher education programs (Farrell, 2021a). For the most part, learner teachers are "forced" (Hobbs, 2007, p. 405) to reflect in such programs on criteria established by their teacher-educators, who have invariably reduced reflection to recipes that follow checklists that *they* think important. The result of this "reflection," which overlooks the inner lives of the teachers, is that many learner teachers end up wanting to please their teacher-educators rather than engage in any of their *own* self-reflections of what *they* consider important (see Farrell, 2021a for more on this). Thus, in this book, I provide clarity on how learner teachers and early career ESL teachers

can engage in reflection by outlining in detail a framework they can use to *systematically* and *holistically* reflect on their practice (see Chapter 2 for more on this framework).

In addition, I conceptualize teacher attrition as a process rather than a fixed event of a teacher quitting (such as Damien's example in the preamble), which begins in the first few years and culminates in the fifth year or so (Clandinin et al., 2015). Thus, the overall goal is to gain more insight into the lived experiences and adaptation challenges (i.e., their "ways of knowing" (Szesztay, 2004) of early career ESL teachers as they reflect on the experiences. I also compare their reflections with the reflections of ESL teachers in their seventh and tenth years, respectfully considering they decided to remain in the profession. To the best of my knowledge, no previous longitudinal qualitative research through the use of reflective practice with early career ESL teachers has been carried out in any context.

As teachers are the most important professionals in a country that wants to invest in the future, and ESL teachers are the first point of human contact for many incoming immigrants into countries and other learners who take government-funded language courses, the contents of this book will raise important considerations for policymakers, initial teacher-educators, school leaders, and government personnel responsible for funding ESL teacher training and language programs and courses in the struggle to retain high-quality ESL teachers in the profession regardless of the context. I hope that the knowledge gained from reading about the seven ESL teachers will be of help to educators in gaining not only more knowledge about teacher attrition and retention, but also about what kind of teachers they turn out to be. In addition, if they form the habit of reflecting as outlined in this book, I maintain that they will become even better teachers.

Such knowledge could and should be fed back into language teacher education and development programs, as well as into schools, so that ESL teachers can be better prepared for the realities and challenges that they may face in the first years of teaching. Thus, from an educational perspective, the main beneficiaries of this book should be early career ESL teachers, second-language educators, school administrators, students, families, and society in general – because all these groups have major stakes in the successful induction of early career ESL teachers, as the literature review in this chapter indicated. The findings from the reflections of the seven ESL teachers I hope can help all educational stakeholders to come together and work in collaboration to make for a smooth transition for

early career ESL teachers from their second-language teacher preparation programs to their first years of teaching. The idea is that the knowledge garnered from the seven case studies presented here can be used to better inform and illuminate language teacher-educators and programs about the lived experiences of early career ESL teachers, because many TESOL programs still have only limited information about how their graduates are faring in their induction years or even what their work lives actually involve (Farrell, 2021a).

What Is Not Covered

Before I outline the structure of the book, I would like to point out a few issues I do not cover – not because they are not important, but because I have already covered some of these in other places and I want to save space for what I think is important to cover in this book, with limited space.

The first issue I do not cover in great detail in this book is a comprehensive discussion of the concept of reflective practice in terms of its origins, philosophical and epistemological background, as well as all the different approaches to reflection, reflective practice, and the body of research that represents all this. I have already covered most of this elsewhere (see Farrell, 1999a; 1999b; 2001a; 2001b; 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2006a; 2006b; 2006c; 2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2009a; 2009b; 2012a; 2012b; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2014; 2015a; 2016; 2017a; 2017b; 2018a; 2018b; 2019a; 2019b; 2021a; 2022).

Nor do I cover early career ESL teachers' language proficiency issues, although I acknowledge that some readers may wonder if any of the participants had any issues with their English language proficiency while teaching. I believe such an issue is related to the dichotomy between non-native English speaker teachers and native English speaker teachers. However, I do not agree with this dichotomy, in that I believe ESL/EFL teachers are either qualified or they are not. I consider any unqualified person teaching ESL a conversation partner at best.

I have also written about this issue before and I have stated that "it is not who you are in terms of your ethnicity, culture or race as a TESOL teacher, but what you know in terms of your effectiveness as a teacher regardless of your background" (Farrell, 2015b, p. 80). This does not mean that I disagree with Edge (2011), when he noted that some "qualified" ESL/EFL teachers face discrimination and racism within TESOL because of their skin color and/or the perceived version of the English language they use. When discussing the critical competencies that learner language teachers need to be taught in order to be effective, I have also stated that

the profession should decide what competencies would be enough to make one a "qualified" TESOL teacher (see Farrell, 2021a for more on this topic).

Structure of the Book

The book consists of eleven chapters after the preface.

Chapter 1 outlines and discusses the issues and challenges ECTs face at various times in their first five years of teaching. Next, the chapter outlines the aims of the book and why it is important.

Chapter 2 provides details of the teacher participants and how the stories of their lived experiences were shared and how they evolved. This includes details about the reflective practice framework that was used. This is followed by a discussion of the methodology that includes details about the context, the seven participant teachers, and how their stories were obtained and analyzed.

Chapter 3 provides details of a first-year ESL teacher's reflections on her philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and critical reflections beyond practice. The chapter also describes her interpretations of her overall reflections, followed by a discussion of the teacher's experiences during her first year of teaching.

Chapter 4 provides details of a second-year ESL teacher's reflections on her philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and critical reflections beyond practice. The chapter also describes her interpretations of her overall reflections followed by a discussion of the teacher's experiences during her second year of teaching.

Chapter 5 provides details of a third-year ESL teacher's reflections on his philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and critical reflections beyond practice. The chapter also describes his interpretations of his overall reflections, followed by a discussion of the teacher's experiences during his third year of teaching.

Chapter 6 provides details of a fourth-year ESL teacher's reflections on her philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and critical reflections beyond practice. The chapter also describes her interpretations of her overall reflections, followed by a discussion of the teacher's experiences during her fourth year of teaching.

Chapter 7 provides details of a fifth-year ESL teacher's reflections on her philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and critical reflections beyond practice. The chapter also describes her interpretations of her overall reflections followed by a discussion of the teacher's experiences during her fifth year of teaching.

Chapter 8 provides details of a seventh-year ESL teacher's reflections on her philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and critical reflections beyond practice. The chapter also describes her interpretations of her overall reflections, followed by a discussion of the teacher's experiences during her seventh year of teaching.

Chapter 9 provides details of a tenth-year ESL teacher's reflections on her philosophy, principles, theory, practice, and critical reflections beyond practice. The chapter also describes her interpretations of her overall reflections followed by a discussion of the teacher's experiences during her tenth year of teaching.

Chapter 10 provides an overall summary of the results of the seven ESL teachers' journeys through each of the five stages, or a reflection-*on*-action summary of the main findings. This is followed by all seven ESL teachers' reflections on the findings of their individual reflective journeys. The chapter also discusses the teachers' reflective dispositions, including open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility.

Chapter 11 provides a reflection for action by presenting a model for early career ESL teacher development that includes *reflection*, *support*, *resilience*, and *well-being*. The chapter also discusses some limitations of the work and considerations for future research.

How to Use the Book

Reflective Practice for Early Career Language Teachers is intended to be a companion for all early career ESL teachers: It provides commentary and guidance directly related to reflections on the lived experiences of five ESL teachers in their crucial induction years as well as the reflections of two more established teachers during their seventh and tenth years of teaching. This book is also for teacher-educators and program administrators and supervisors who are responsible for providing professional development opportunities for early career ESL teachers, as well as for those taking graduate courses in TESOL who are interested in the field of second language teacher education. The book also outlines in detail how reflective practice is operationalized using my framework for reflecting on practice so that future learner teachers, ECTs, and experienced teachers can engage in their own reflection through their entire careers.

Each chapter also has an abundance of **reflective breaks**, which are addressed not only to learner TESOL teachers and early career TESOL teachers but also to other stakeholders who may be interested in the focus of these breaks. Learner language teachers are encouraged

to reflect on each of the breaks and discuss the questions with peers and their TESOL teacher-educators. Language teacher-educators may encourage their learner TESOL teachers to go through each of these sets of reflective breaks, or they may decide to choose only the most relevant ones depending on interest levels, time, and context. Early career language teachers can also consider these questions and explore them alone by writing their answers in a journal as they go through the contents of the book, or through discussion or dialogic reflections with other early career language teachers using face-to-face or online formats to facilitate their reflections. School administrators and school-appointed mentors can also read this book and answer the various reflective break questions, either alone or with early career language teachers. In addition, I believe that the contents of this book are not restricted to just the above mentioned stakeholders as others, such as government officials responsible for funding ESL and teacher education programs may also learn from the book and its reflective breaks, so that we can all do a better job of not only recruiting the best and brightest language teachers but also retaining them as happy professionals throughout their careers. Of course, all readers are invited to include their own reflective breaks, which may differ from those in the book.

Conclusion

This opening chapter has explored the early career teaching years, with a special focus on a review of the research into why teachers leave or stay in the crucial first five years, as well as how they are changed by their experiences. The review suggests that after the first year, when teachers leave because of feeling ill-prepared for the realities of school life, ECTs leave in the years that follow for multiple reasons, but the two most telling ones seem to be a lack of support and a bad working climate in the school with administration and colleagues. An effective teacher induction program with some kind of supervision in the form of mentoring to support ECTs seems to be the best way to help retain ECTs. The chapter then outlined the main aim of the book and each chapter. The next chapter explains how reflective practice is operationalized in this book and describes who the participants are and how their lived experiences were researched, so that others can conduct similar teacher reflections in different contexts.