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Mujeres Unidas y Activas

Introduction to the Theme Section: Graduate Student Professional Development

Background

I am pleased to present the first *CATESOL Journal* special theme section by and about graduate students, a section dedicated to exploring the complexities of professional development for graduate students in the field of TESOL.

When discussing critical practices in language-teacher training, Freeman and Hawkins (2004) point out that "the chance to think together, in disciplined ways, through collaborative exploration, reflection, and conversation is key" to professional development. They suggest that "three elements—time, professional space, and disciplined ways of thinking" are necessary for making such interactions productive (p. 3). This *CATESOL Journal* special theme section aims to give TESOL graduate students this chance. It sets aside the time and professional space for them to participate in disciplined collaborative exploration to add their voices to an ongoing conversation about professionalism in the TESOL field.

The call for proposals for this section asked for ideas heavy in reflection and personal experience. A number of TESOL resources suggest ways that graduate students can conduct professional development, but we wanted to know how this process actually plays out at the individual, graduate student level. The authors who contributed to this theme section are now enrolled in or recently graduated from TESOL graduate programs in California. At this stage in their careers, they work with a variety of TESOL professionals and explore a number of different perspectives; as such, graduate students have a unique, multifaceted understanding of what it means to be a TESOL professional.

In their articles, the authors employ a narrative approach to help them think about their professional-development experiences and structure their reflection. Johnson and Golombek (2011) highlight the ability narrative has "to ignite cognitive processes that can foster teacher professional development" (pp. 504-505). They also acknowledge that narrative is "a complex undertaking" for second language teachers in training whose "histories include both the particulars of their teaching and their culturally and historically situated experiences as students" (p. 491). The process of constructing this special theme section was indeed a complex undertaking. It was also truly representative of the collaborative nature of professional writing and an incredible professional-

development experience for this editor and authors alike. We learned how to balance editor, author, colleague, peer, and student identities as we worked in person and online in groups of two, three, and even four to brainstorm about how to best articulate our stories and visions about graduate student professional development.

Overview

The stories in this theme section are unique but should be read as the collective experience of TESOL graduate students. Although no two experiences are exactly the same, there are salient themes that tie these articles together. They are reflection and inquiry pieces about acceptance, belonging, and identity, about looking for and finding your place in the vast field of TESOL.

Lorimer and Schulte open the special theme section with a broad critical look at what criteria characterize a TESOL professional. They argue that as graduate students actively take advantage of professional-development opportunities, they not only shape their own professional identities but also contribute to the professionalization of the field at large.

In the next two articles the authors share insights on how their struggles to implement pedagogical practices and acquire an authoritative voice helped shape their professional identities as well as build more empathetic relationships with their students in on-campus tutoring and teaching positions. Stranahan describes how she questioned traditional methodology as a first-time tutor. Her narrative illustrates how her tutoring practice became self-reflective and discusses the professional-development implications of putting theory to work in a real-life setting early in the graduate program. Fridriksson also grappled with insecurities around authorship and membership in a new field and as a result better understood her students' struggle to acquire an academic discourse. In her article, she recounts how pushing herself to present at an international conference shifted her perspective on how she and her students could make their voices heard in new professional communities.

McCluskey and the team of Laidemitt, DeMola, Martin, and Kelley reached beyond their programs to take advantage of off-campus professional-development opportunities. These authors gained valuable teaching, curriculum-development, and language-program administration skills when they put their TESOL training to work in their community. McCluskey pursued her passion for ESL in certificate and master's programs but still received little information on how to teach the population she was most interested in working with. To address this gap in her training, she actively sought out opportunities in her community to supplement her graduate course work with relevant hands-on training. Laidemitt et al. worked on a group project together in a curriculum-development course in their graduate program. In their article, the authors outline the design of the curriculum project and the community program where they implemented it. They conclude with personal narratives that discuss how community partnership has contributed to their professional development.

Our last two articles provide examples of how graduate students continue to create opportunities that inform their professional practices after gradua-

tion. In her MA TESOL program, Gonzalves focused on research training in order to complete a research-heavy thesis. In her article, she discusses how this professional practice informs the decisions she makes as a teacher and administrator and connects her to other practitioners in the field. Wadell, Frei, and Martin conclude our theme section with an inquiry-based discussion of sexual identity in TESOL. They conclude that the topic is by and large absent in TESOL teacher training and give suggestions on how to further integrate issues of diversity into graduate program and ESL classroom curricula. Since graduation, the authors have continued to raise awareness around sexual identity in TESOL and create professional-development opportunities through which they and other teachers can further explore the topic.

The goal for this theme section is to showcase authentic graduate student voices. I hope for these articles to both inform the professional-development practices of the graduate students who conduct them and contribute to the knowledge and understanding of TESOL professionalism for the field at large.

Author

Christina Lorimer received a MA TESOL degree from San Francisco State University and served as the student representative on the CATESOL Board of Directors from 2009 to 2011. She has taught academic and nonacademic English in the US and abroad. Her primary interests are community-based ESL, immigrant literacies, and curriculum development/assessment. In 2012, she will be conducting teacher training in Brazil with the support of the Fulbright Program.

Acknowledgments

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