

Sustaining EAL expertise: voices from research

2023 VicTESOL Symposium

Reflect on your own learning-to-teach experiences - what was the most memorable experience and why?

↻ I remember very little reflective practice. It really wasn't a feature.

↻ **Teach off the student**
So simple and accessible

↻ **Imagine, trial, reflect, grow**

↻ Watching experienced teachers engage their students

↻ Trial and error

↻ **The practical aspect in schools**

↻ **Learning on job**

↻ I've been encouraged from day 1 to be a reflective teacher and find it's a practice that is invaluable on a daily basis.

↻ **Nervous to confident**
I remember when I was a pre-service teacher at my primary school placement, I was very nervous about having to know everything about the topic that I will be teaching and worried about being judged by students that I have no idea what I'm teaching.

↻ It was definitely a treasure hunt

↻ I don't remember reflecting other than very superficially

↻ Victoria College Toorak Campus. We had many tutorials, discussions, performance. Pre online times. Went to Indonesia for final teaching round. Great training and experiences.

↻ Started with learning about my subject and developing a passion for it, followed by building relationships with peers then putting what I'd learnt into practice and learning from the experience.

↪ Concepts that can be applied practically to any teaching context

↪ Honestly, whenever I have a pre service teacher now, I try to impress upon them how valuable reflecting on every single session is. Once you're fully qualified, it can unfortunately fall by the wayside, in the attempt to keep on top of everything else.

↪ Theory stands the rest of time.
New theories progress pedagogy

↪ Collaborative learning with my peers

↪ In my early years of teaching I was "lucky" and were in the proximity of some fantastically supportive, reflective and passionate teachers. I find I draw on their strengths and role modelling regularly. I still see it out and try to offer my experience to other teachers but context restricts it sometimes eg physical nature of classroom setups

↪ Making mistakes is ok. They are an important part of the learning process.

↪ Opportunity to see other teachers in action, whether incidentally or planned

↪ Getting constructive feedback from mentor teacher

↪ **Why does teacher training also not teach classroom management skills?**

↪ Somedays you could see the theories come to life in the classroom.
Peer to peer interactions are so important.

↪ Mentors, other experienced teachers assistance is very valuable

↪ Not realising the importance of theory

↪ **Learning to act, be an actor in class**

↪ **Practical fun activities**
When I was learning to teach Psychology during my Master, I was often surprised by the students-centred learning activities that my tutor was showing us. I was genuinely engaged with the Psychology content; I enjoyed learning about the content. I thought back to

learning Psychology at school, it was dry, content-heavy, lots of teacher talk. Then I understood the importance of teaching off students, not at the students.

⇒ **At uni**

Lecturers that bridged theory and practice - those who made learning very hands on / practical.
Learning without experience is challenging, given we don't have anything to 'latch on to' yet!

What do you see as the relationship between theory and practice?

⇒ **Role-modelling teaching techniques and behaviour is crucial**

⇒ Understanding what the research says about language acquisition and how it applies to my practice.

⇒ Theory acts as a direction for teachers when they plan for students. A guide to reflect on when teacher is lost.

⇒ **Theory is used within the practice and is drawn on as needed**

⇒ Current theories and best practices are key. However, they should serve as a place for exploration, questioning and development.

⇒ So important to put theory into practice. Role modelling, being supported as you try, and having no fear in making mistakes

⇒ Theory sets a foundation for practice.

⇒ Hopefully, the theory changes and updates in response to the needs of learners and as a result, practice changes.

⇒ Has more success if practice and theory are integrated

⇒ Basis for introduction to new ideas. A springboard to how it may apply in teaching practice.

⇒ Having enough practical experience to understand and apply the theory.

⇒ Theory is important but it needs reinforcement in practice.

⇒ **Good read**

↪ **Reflecting on your own teaching all the time**

↪ Theory and practice are not very valuable without each other - they are interdependent.

Consider a memorable student you have taught in the past - describe what his/her learning 'looked and felt' like, and why?

↪ **So eager to express thoughts in English. Would smile and try ... was so encouraging to see him 'have a go' and take risks with words and phrases.**

↪ A strong will to learn. Eye contact.

↪ An EAL student who missed out on school back in home country for a year in Grade 1, didnt have support during COVID and being placed in split class due to teacher shortage. He could not read at Grade 3 in Term 3 this year but now he can recognise most of the alphabets and the initial sounds pf these alphabets, matching pictures to CVC words with minimum support. Classroom teacher has supported him in his reading and there have always been an aid in the classroom to support him. Im so glad that he has come a long way.

↪ Bright, driven, academic, took risks, engaged. Always tried to extend her beyond what other in the group could cope with. required very differentiated approach.

↪ **Not afraid to make mistakes**

That's why so important to have those psychological tools to teach off your students: trust, relationships, safety

↪ Some of the students I have supported who are newly arrived have experienced a period of time where they appear to be somewhat disengaged with learning. Teachers have sometimes reported concerns related to their progress. Some young people have, after a year or two, suddenly started to flourish, making sudden and impressive jumps in their learning. This reminds me that learning can happen asynchronously and in a non-linear way.

↪ A student with learning issues and low confidence found his strengths and used them to flourish 🌟

↪ A student who takes risks to try and communicate ideas and really wants to have a go/improve/understand new concepts

⇒ She was so eager to learn how to read so she could prove to her children that she is capable and not too old. We cried and hugged when she read her first few sentences.

⇒ **Mature, insightful, critical thinker**
A secondary EAL learner who constantly surprised me with his profound perspectives. I felt inspired, grateful to be learning from him. It makes me a more well-rounded person to have my biases/rigidity exposed.

How do you think professional learning has shaped or continues to shape your knowledge and practice?

⇒ Professional learning has shaped my direction in EAL teaching. I could see the impact of what I implemented and it helped me to reflect on my practice as a teacher

⇒ I have learned so much about teaching after my initial training. It is so important to keep learning.

⇒ **There is not enough PL for staff.**
There is no EAL PL at the Academy

⇒ We all need to continue to learn and be students of good professional practice ourselves. Important to keep up with curriculum updates/ changes too.

⇒ **The classroom**
Theory is about the classroom, but practice happens in a million classrooms

⇒ It is critical. I am an EAL Coordinator and Refugee Support Coordinator. I don't have a team and it can be isolating. Learning and networking with EAL colleagues is very helpful.

⇒ Professional learning is a journey.

⇒ theories of teaching and learning serving as the basis for reflective practice

⇒ The most memorable PL challenged my philosophy of teaching - my whole approach to everything I did, and transformed my practice AND my identity as as a teacher.

⇒ Great mentors who are honest, sharing and genuinely interested have been so valuable to me and taught me to so much and hopefully I am now able to pay forward

⇒ Professional learning has been the most important part of me as an EAL teacher. So much to learn!

↩ **Because of the PLC structure at my school, we don't get an opportunity for any EAL PD ever. We have to do our moderation during our planning time :(**

↩ The more I learn, the more I realise I've learnt this before, but had forgotten that I knew it.

↩ PDs are important but they will be more effective when they are opportunities for practicing and discussing with mentors and peers.

How prepared were you for the classroom? What did you learn once you were a practicing teacher that you didn't in your ITE?

↩ Not well. Behaviour management was a huge issue. I had a good understanding of the content, but learned a lot about how to teach on the job- especially from primary colleagues

↩ The behavioral issues that arose from prolonged experiences of feeling unsuccessful in schooling due to poor language support.

↩ Needed to learn behaviour management for myself- we all have different styles...

↩ **Spontaneous**
I have learnt that teaching in a classroom is all about the flexibility and adaptability when your lesson plan doesn't go as planned. Just being able to mediate students' responses and make meaning out of their prior knowledge and linking the goal of the lesson.

↩ **On the job learning had greater impact. Great mentoring and support helps develop confidence and skills in the real teaching world. Differentiation is needed based on the learning needs of the students in front of you**

↩ **Not really because nobody modelled the behaviour and a way of speaking in the classroom, nobody modelled discipline techniques...**

↩ I was a Primary teacher, then Adult Education and for the three year Secondary. I had to learn "on the job" how to manage these different classrooms, best approaches, and behaviour management for the Secondary classroom is key.

↩ It took awhile but that it was O.K not to be the dispenser of all knowledge,

⇒ **How each classroom is different**
Each term is a new experience, maybe teaching at a different site, different level

⇒ **The psycho-social issues for our students and their ability to attend class and to learn**

⇒ **Absolutely important but I need more of it, not a lot of time to take advantage of my work community, no structured opportunities, or v few anyway**

⇒ I was ready to be a teacher, but felt that I only learnt the on the ground stuff once I had a classroom and the students to find my own way.

⇒ **Finding your teacher identity**
Uni didn't prepare for the classroom management I had to deal with at all. I felt like being thrown in the deep end and learn very quickly and trying different strategies to manage behaviours. But the best strategies are the ones that fit my teacher identity the most.

How important are mentors and experienced colleagues to the development of you as a teacher?

⇒ Continue to learn so much from them

⇒ Ongoing process of Learning, trialling, reflecting, refining.
Being open to insights from both theory and practice.
Not holding too tightly to what 'should' be done but being flexible and responsive

⇒ Ongoing and ideally sustained.
Evolving - growing as a teacher

⇒ Mentoring is a two way partnership where it provides mutual contributions, agency, competence, nurturing learning relationships and like every relationship it requires effort and commitment. We co-learn, co-construct and co-plan to provide structured mediation spaces and develop each other's capabilities through reflection, coaching and modelling. It is an ongoing partnership based on trust and respect. The aim is to share the expertise, knowledge and skill and have responsive mediation.

⇒ **Support and Learning**
I always seek support and eager to learn from experienced teachers and colleagues, then critically analyse what can be done better or modified to be used in my teaching.

⇒ **Building respect and trust is paramount.**
Being open to change and try out new ideas-

ie be flexible in your learning journey.

⇒ **Ongoing Mentoring and coaching is especially important for all teachers no matter what stage of teachers experience. Both structured and non structured**

⇒ **Essential. We need ongoing mentors even as very experienced teacher.**

⇒ I still seek advice

⇒ So important! There are many ways to be a good teacher and finding someone who works in a way that inspires you is essential.

⇒ **It's critical to have leaders ie executive principals, within the school to have a clear vision and understanding of the needs of EAL students. This leadership will lift the skills and practices of all teachers. Without it, these 'treasure hunts' will only happen in pockets within the school**

⇒ Multiple mentors! Different perspectives, different strategies, philosophies. Enables teachers to develop a toolkit to draw on in their own teaching

⇒ **CRUCIAL! There is never enough time devoted to it.**

⇒ **Less ongoing support in adult sector in some cases, when you get your teaching position it can feel like it ends, no one has ever come in my classroom to observe me (adult sector teacher)**

⇒ Very! You need colleagues around you to bounce ideas off.

What does a dialogic approach mean for you in your practice? Within/between schools/ different institutional settings/sectors?

⇒ It is a dialogue that brings every one together! Having a common learning goal/goals. A form of communication to support our learners and the different agencies, and schools!

⇒ I felt prepared as I could be. I had learnt some effective behaviour mgt strategies from my placements and learnt more on job. I felt fortunate to begin my teaching journey as a postgraduate and after working in a different field for a few years.

⇒ Collaboration, shared goals and approaches.

⇒ **Interactions**

I appreciate professional learning and development that is relevant to my teaching specialty. Ongoing conversations and exchanging opinions support teachers in self reflection in their learning and teaching long term. Hence, it benefits the students.

⇒ **Dialogic implies 2 way communication- between student and teacher and between colleagues. Mutual respect is needed.**

⇒ **Hugely important in the beginning but also still to this day.**

⇒ **Adult sector**

Need more opportunities for sustaining expertise; many casual part-time staff, not available for development, professional development needs more funding, competitive contracts

⇒ **Dialogue approach is important and a planned collaborative structure for conversations between groups departments, stakeholders and program deliverers could be strengthened.**

⇒ **Need access to those that exist, they go to management and have no time**

⇒ Knowing your students, understanding their prior knowledge, allows you to teach and feedback in a two way process (a dialogue). Learning happens when you transfer content from short term to long term memory, and we do that through building connections between what we know and what we learn. A dialogic approach enables and cements this connection!

⇒ I love these days because I get the dialogue I don't get in my own school.

⇒ True dialogic teaching occurs when you check for understanding and respond to student needs within a co-created context. Meet them where they are and shape what they learn next together!

Is the transition between ITE and the classroom different for different sectors – eg schools vs adult?

⇒ As a Secondary teacher, you need expertise, create relationships and excellent behaviour management skills.
