



Introduction to Graduate Student Perspectives: Theory to Practice

Welcome to the Graduate Student Theme Section of *The CATESOL Journal!* This section is designed to highlight the work and experiences of current and recent TESOL graduate students as they explore the relationship between theory and practice.

If our field is to continue to develop and professionalize, it is integral that we include the voices of graduate students in recognized and systematic ways. Their intellectual curiosity, immersion in pedagogical theories, and commitment to professional development are assets that can help advance both theories and practice, but many graduate students do not believe that they have much to offer while they are in training. Too often their valuable work remains sequestered in graduate programs.

This theme section is dedicated to providing a space for graduate students to share their ideas, work, and experiences with the greater CATESOL audience. Shaping their ideas, work, and experiences into the articles you see here has given these authors a meaningful context in which to build their membership in the TESOL community of practice and continue to form their teacher identities (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Wenger, 1998).

The topic for this theme section is Theory to Practice. As recent and current graduate students, and often inexperienced teachers, the authors are positioned to explore the relationship between theory and practice from a unique perspective. Toward the end of their theory-heavy graduate programs, students must transition from the study of theory to the doing of practice and often grapple with the integration of the two. The call for papers for this theme section invited authors to reflect on any aspect of the bridge between theory and practice, and these submissions represent a variety of approaches, experiences, and philosophies on the topic. The articles are united not only by the theme, but also in their treatment of it; the authors describe their relationship to theory and practice not as a linear movement from one to the other, but as complex and recursive.

Schulte opens the theme section with a narrative of her changing understanding of the relationship between theory and practice during her 1st year as a teacher. She argues that teacher development is a dynamic and recursive system rather than linear and constant, as advocated by many traditional stage models of teacher development.

Holland discusses her experiences as a MA TESOL student in a Linguistics

department and her use of structural linguistics, including syntax and phonetics, in her ESL classroom. She describes the conditions that led to her introduction of linguistic theory to her students and argues that she has been able to improve her teaching and her research by drawing on methods and theories from both structural and applied linguistics.

In the next three articles, the authors relate how a research project led to a deeper understanding of theory, which in turn influenced their practice, beliefs, and future research. Mori describes how a desire to better understand the writing of her students led to a research project that allowed her to develop theoretical frameworks. She explains how these theories have influenced her teaching as well as her research. Takano shares her experiences conducting a case study of an ESL student and the resulting development in her understanding of her own classroom. She reflects on the value of this intensive and deeply contextualized type of research for graduate students. Anderson reports on how new composition teachers with no TESOL training cope with the increasing numbers of Generation 1.5 and ESL students in their classrooms. Based on the feedback from many new teachers who struggle with the gap between their theoretical training and the reality of their classrooms, he argues for the addition of more practical training in teacher-training programs and closer collaboration between the fields of TESOL and composition.

Eckstein and the team of Albilehi, Han, and DeSmidt reflect on their experiences applying theory to a specific project and the resulting complex interplay between theory and practice. Eckstein relied on the recursive relationship between theory and practice to design a successful writing-conference program. He explores ways in which the practice of teachers involved in the program informed his understanding of theories and how his theories adjusted to better describe and, ultimately, guide the implementation of the program. Albilehi, Han, and DeSmidt discuss the need to adapt curriculum-design theory to their specific context and needs while developing a curriculum project for a graduate course. This hands-on project helped solidify their understanding of theory, but it also changed their beliefs, attitudes, and strategies as English language teachers and led to professional growth and empowerment.

Although these articles are all written by current or recent graduate students, the way we conceptualize the link between theory and practice is an important issue to all ESOL teachers. Graduate students are not the only ones who juggle practice with theory, and their stories and ideas may inspire others to examine their own relationship to theory and practice more closely or in a new way.

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