**ACTA 2018 Conference Reflection**

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As a teacher who has recently transitioned into the TESOL field in Queensland, I have been grateful for the professional support and welcome I have received from QATESOL’s members and management committee this year. This support was extended to include a generous QATESOL travel grant, which allowed me to attend the national ACTA conference in Adelaide this year. I am so glad I was able to get there: it has played an important role in my personal as well as professional development.

Firstly, the personal. Why? Because the conversations I had and the connections I formed with other teachers at the ACTA conference have changed the way I view myself. I am a mother of four, who has retrained in TESOL after 20 years as a music and German teacher. I do not have the TESOL ‘street cred’ which I perceived others as having: years spent teaching English, teaching overseas or teaching in language schools. This contributed to a lack of confidence in my ability to count myself as an equal in the TESOL field.

“Confidence in itself, though, does not equate to competence” ([Borg](http://simon-borg.co.uk/blog/), 2018). A brief conversation with Phan Le Ha confirmed to me that teaching and learning is more than just the sum of university subjects I have completed and the curriculum content I am delivering. It is more than how many language schools I have taught ESL in. What I bring to TESOL is enhanced by everything I bring with me to the classroom: my past is an asset to my current teaching practice.

Le Ha’s observation was that, just as my current practice is enhanced by my previous teaching skills and experiences in a new context, so too my students are learners whose English learning journey is enhanced by the previous cultural and and linguistic skills and experiences which they bring with them to the ESL classroom. This is a thought which underpins the concept of translanguaging.

In her keynote address, Le Ha spoke of “shifting away from the discriminatory ‘other Englishes’…and the ‘Western’ native speaker model mindset. Moving towards seeing English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) teachers and students as resources and **make full use of their** **cultural, educational, intellectual and linguistic resources and capabilities**” (Phan, 2018)[[1]](#footnote-1). Her research into the use of EMI in teaching contexts throughout Asia continues to challenge these mindsets. She encouraged us as teachers to “talk about the importance of the past, and how it makes who you are and who you want to be in the future” (Phan, 2018)[[2]](#footnote-2).

What will these ideas look like in our language classrooms? Translanguaging is not a simple one-size-fits-all teaching method, rather it is something which I have been encouraged to continue to explore in my practice. It can be conversations in the staff room about the importance of openly valuing and including students’ home languages. It can be a visible inclusion of students’ languages in written forms around our classrooms, or in written tasks. It is up to us as teachers to push boundaries (bring on the 2020 ACTA conference, Brisbane!), challenge established mindsets, embrace and include our students’ home languages and value these as tools which can enhance their English language learning journey.

Professionally, a highlight and point of learning for me was meeting and hearing from from Shem Macdonald (Latrobe University), Liz Keenan and Margaret Corrigan (Carringbush Adult Education, Melbourne) at the conference. Their experiences of implementing a centre-wide approach to training in pronunciation teaching with EAL teachers and students at their centre since 2014 was inspiring. I have developed a keen interest in pronunciation teaching since I began studying and working in TESOL last year, but was not aware that I had colleagues ‘down south’ who were as passionate about working with beginner adults and teaching pronunciation as I was.

Liz and Margaret have led professional development in pronunciation teaching with teachers at Carringbush. This is no small accomplishment. To implement and continue to support a centre-wide approach in an area of teaching which is unfamiliar to most teachers takes a lot of hard work and dedication. Shem’s research in the field of pronunciation teaching, identity and teacher cognition allows for academic collaboration which supports teacher’s professional development.

Pronunciation teaching is an area which can provoke discussion among teachers. Some questions which are often raised are: do we include an IPA chart in our lessons? If so, at what stage of learning? What techniques do we use to teach aspects of pronunciation? Which aspects do we focus on when and why? Teachers can feel that by commenting on a student’s pronunciation, they are commenting negatively on a student’s identity as an English speaker. However, by responding to teachers’ interest in learning more about pronunciation teaching, Liz, Margaret and Shem have been able to assist teachers to incorporate it into lessons both incidentally and explicitly.

A consistent approach to teaching across the program was the key to success. Teachers have implemented uniform ways of identifying connected speech and syllables and are consistent in their use of a “sound of the week” across classes. The successful inclusion of IPA charts, anchor word charts and an understanding of how to present and teach features of pronunciation by moving from controlled to freer practice has enabled teachers to more confidently approach pronunciation teaching in lessons. Consistency across what teachers are doing has helped learners to develop their oral communication skills, and progress from oral to written communication in a supported and consistent fashion.

I am looking forward to maintaining connections with teachers and researchers I met at ACTA 2018, and building on rich professional learning experiences I gained while there. I am beginning to feel that I have a little more ‘street cred’: the TESOL teaching community is as inclusive and diverse as the students in its classrooms. Active involvement in ACTA has been an essential part of my development as a teacher, and I would encourage any teachers who are able to come and ‘push their boundaries’ at ACTA Conference 2020 in Brisbane.

1. Phan Le Ha, Keynote address ACTA Conference 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Phan Le Ha, personal communication, October 3, 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)