

EPDE Newsletter

News from the *EFL/ESL Program via Distance Education*

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Becoming an English Teacher

Feature Story by Charles Danoff

In the summer of 2008, I began working abroad, teaching English as a Foreign Language. I had no training or experience in the field. My introduction came at a summer camp in Switzerland for children who wanted to learn English. Aside from regular camp activities like sports and arts and crafts, the campers had two English classes per day. I and a fellow counselor taught beginning English to five students from four different countries. We were also lucky enough to work with other students helping them make a movie in English to show their friends.



Switzerland was a good experience of putting my toe in the water to test its temperature. Following the month I dove in when I started working in Japan. My post there was a rural town of 4,000, where I was lucky to eat sushi caught that day, sumo wrestle locals and play in a Taiko (Japanese drum) concert. I was responsible for teaching at ten different schools from kindergarten through junior high. It was a wonderful first year, because I was an Assistant teacher, which gave me a great chance to learn with limited responsibility.

Following that year I felt ready to teach on my own, so I headed west to mainland China, and settled in a Southern city of about a million. I taught 21 oral and aural English classes per week to 7th and 8th grade junior high school students. It was an incredible year featuring dynamic conversations such as:

Teacher: "Where do you want to travel?"

Students: "Paris ... Tokyo ... New York City."

T: "Why?"

S: "Beautiful ... Romantic ... Special."

One enthusiastic boy raised his hand.

T: "Yes?"

Boy: "Australia."

T: "Why?"

B: "To see the dinosaurs!"

Luckily for me my main responsibilities were getting my students comfortable speaking English and ideally no longer afraid of making mistakes. As the year progressed I improved, but I came to realize it was time for me to start studying myself. I did some research of programs available online. Most of them looked pretty generic from companies or places I had never

heard of ... and then I found the EPDE. Did a little reading and it seemed perfect. It was the most rigorous and I would be taking graduate level courses.

Started with Faridah Pawan's English in Global Contexts in the spring, which was an eye opening experience. It had been so long since I read academic journal articles or did real research. It was incredible to read about things like Teaching English Through English (Kang 2007) the approach of only having EFL classes in English and its struggles, and then being able to relate those back to my experiences. I reflected about how learning more Japanese and Chinese made my classes much better. Additionally, it was wonderful to get advice from Professor Pawan and my talented classmates.

As the school year came to a close I took Professor Margaret Mullin's practicum course, introducing me to teacher-research. This was a really exciting and new idea for me, that I have validity as a researcher and my own experiences are important (Hubbard and Power, 1999). I enjoyed interviewing and doing research on one of my students and learned a formal name for something I had already been kind of doing and now wish to formalize going forward.

What I had already been doing was keeping notes on myself and "researching" the best way to improve my classes. Some of those notes I published on Wikiveristy (a sister project of Wikipedia). This spring I applied to give a speech about what I was doing at the 2010 Wikimedia (non-profit behind Wikipedia) conference, and I was accepted. So, I went off to Gdansk, Poland and delivered a fifteen minute talk about how teachers can collaborate together online to make lessons (Danoff, 2010).

While I was there I was still working on an EPDE course, this one by Bitia Zakeri on Language Foundations. Again my personal experiences were reinforced by research as I read about how an important quality for learning a foreign language is an environment that allows learners to make mistakes (Krashen 2004). I felt that was true in both my students and in my own experiences learning a foreign language.

Indiana's EPDE course has been a perfect fit for me over the past seven months, allowing me to learn how to be a better teacher while still working and teaching abroad. I have gotten so much from the articles I have read, fellow students and professors. The best example came in a quote from a former classmate about how "you will enjoy having your intuitions backed

up by formal research.” That has been the case so far, though it has been equally as helpful to have my intuitions squashed. I plan on enjoying the time I have left in the program and look forward to proudly explaining to future employers what I was able to accomplish.

References

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About the author

Charles Jeffrey Danoff has been teaching English as a Foreign Language in China and Japan over the past two years. He is from Winnetka a suburb on Chicagoland's North Shore. His website is <<http://danoff.org>>. At the time of this writing he is looking for a job teaching English in Korea.

EPDE courses in upcoming semester

Three EPDE teaching certificate courses is going to be offered in the fall semester.

- L539 Language Foundations for ESL/EFL teachers
- L530 Computer Assisted Language Learning
- L530 Language Literacy Policy Planning
- L525 Practicum in Language Education

Please note that our first course for the EFL/ESL teacher trainer track is offered this semester. For more information about the class schedule, please go to <http://education.indiana.edu/disted>. If you have questions about the courses, please email Sara Gibson at deregstr@indiana.edu.



Recommended Blog - Larry Ferlazzo's Websites of the Day

<http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/>

If you routinely spend time looking for high quality newspaper articles and resources on the web to teach your English Language Learners, you might find Larry Ferlazzo's blog useful. As a current high school ESL teacher, Larry shares useful lists of websites that EFL/ESL teachers may use in their own classrooms.



LARRY FERLAZZO'S WEBSITES OF THE DAY...
...For Teaching ELL, ESL, & EFL



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