



ESL MiniConference

Jidapa Promruang: Achievement Profile Bridging Cultures Through Language Learning

Fall 2007

Achievement
Profile:
Jidapa
Promruang

An American
Indian
Topical Riff

A Picture is
Worth 1,000
Words

101
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1. What are your main activities these days and in what ways have your ESL/EFL experiences inspired or led to these activities?

While working as a Teacher Trainer at TEFL International, I am also studying for a Master's of TEFL at Srikarinwirot University. My experience training Thai and foreign teachers inspired me to study more about the difficulties of Thai teachers. Working with native English-speaking teachers requires me to understand difficult cross-cultural experiences so that I can help them become effective in their new jobs. New teachers in Thailand need to understand the specific challenges their future students will face. By reflecting on how I overcame linguistic obstacles when I learned English, I can share my linguistic perspective and help my trainees form their own.

I also conduct Thai Culture and Thai language classes, which has inspired me to help students with specific activities to help them understand and adapt to my culture. It is especially important for any ex-patriot EFL teacher to have a basic understanding of the culture they are visiting.

2. What are some of your most treasured and what are some of your most difficult memories associated with the work you have done in ESL/EFL or language and culture teaching and learning in general?

Although dealing with different accents, cultures, and ideas has been challenging for me at times, I really enjoy watching my foreign trainees learning and having fun while they're at it. I also love to see English students having fun as they are being taught and gaining more skill with their second language. Best of all, interacting with native English speakers from all over the world lets me explore the differences in local dialects and other cultures. My colleagues at TEFL have been helpful and supportive, and I'm particularly indebted to Dave Hopkins, who has served as my mentor throughout my career here.

The most difficult aspect of my work is sometimes not feeling confident with my language ability. Along with this comes the associated complications of how I am perceived by native speakers while I train them in my second language. Over time, I have become more comfortable with my role, and the difficulties affect me less.

3. If you could go back to the moment when you decided to get involved in ESL/EFL or language and culture teaching or learning, would you make the same choices?

Absolutely. Choosing a career in TEFL has given me opportunities to understand language learning and other cultures that I would never have gotten otherwise.

The only thing I would change is that I would want to feel more assured with my pronunciation of particular phonemes that are difficult for me, such as /th/, /ch/, and /sh/, and wish I could have provided a better listening model for my Thai students to emulate. From a grammatical perspective, I wish I was stronger in my uses of English tenses which are so dramatically different from the Thai system.

Culturally speaking, I wish I had the opportunity to live abroad and gain more direct experience in a native English speaking culture so that I could fully understand the feelings that my students have to go through and that would have made me a better teacher. In my language learning experience, I would like to see Thai students feel more comfortable asking more questions to teachers and peers.

4. What would you like to say about today's global context and what a person can do to have a lasting, positive effect on human society?

Globalization has the potential to create equal opportunities for all regardless of their background and how much money they have. Each individual can contribute by helping other people as much as possible when you have the opportunity and by being a good example for others. In the world today there are exciting opportunities for all if we are given chances. Sometimes it is up to us to

make sure we help others and ourselves to realize our goals, but remember that we all need to cooperate in a global society.

To me, English is one of the most important tools for communicating across cultures. Foreign influences can change a culture, sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse, but when people from different cultures come together with open minds they can learn a lot about themselves. English, because it is an international language, provides a way for people from many cultures to learn from each other, which can bring people closer together even if they live far apart.

5. Who are the people you would include if you drew a concept map or word web to show the associations, influences, and context in which you have developed your sense of yourself as an ESL/EFL or multicultural professional?

First of all my experience working with TEFL International has been wonderful. Dave Hopkins and Bruce Veldhuisen have been particularly helpful and encouraging, and I am very grateful for the opportunities and support they have given me.

Second, I appreciate all of the native-speaking TEFL trainees who have taught me while I'm teaching them. Over the last three years, they have provided me with a constant source of motivation to improve my own English skills and my abilities as a trainer.

Third, all the Thai teachers of English I have trained have inspired me to seek a Master's degree so that in the future I can help train people from my own country to use the highly effective training methods I have learned.

Last, and perhaps most importantly, I have learned as much about teaching and learning from observing the Thai students who work with my TEFL trainees as I have from any other group of people. By seeing how the students respond to the trainees during teaching practice, I get to see exactly how effective my training techniques have been.

6. What is your advice for future ESL/EFL teachers?

You should never stop reading and learning new things. Try to attend seminars, continue researching, and update yourself all the time. Keep your mind open to new ways of thinking and teaching, and don't be afraid of change.

Diane Larsen-Freeman said, "Play the believing game, not the doubting game." To me this means when we meet new ideas we should look at them in terms of how we can use them for our students, instead of assuming that they

won't work.

Finally, put yourself in the learners' shoes. Try to understand as much as possible how your students learn and what they feel about learning. The better you can relate to your students' experience, the more encouraged and motivated you will feel about your own teaching efforts.

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