

THE ETAI TEACHER TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT SIG IS LAUNCHED

Part 1: ETAI Pre-Conference Event

It isn't often that you get an opportunity to be present at the start of something new, something that has the power to change the way we think about teacher training, about the proficiency of non-native ELT teachers, and about the role and impact of research upon English teachers in the classroom. On July 6, 2015, at the ETAI Pre-Conference Event organized by ETAI's newly formed Teacher Training and Development Special Interest Group (SIG), I was privileged to witness the start of a movement for change.

Dr. Lindsey Steinberg-Shapiro opened the day with questions regarding the recruiting of talent, and whether need necessitates compromise. What is a good ELT practitioner? What level of proficiency is required by English teachers? What is learning, and how is learning assessed? Following Dr. Steinberg-Shapiro's opening, Dr. Debbie Lifshitz gave a talk entitled "Shaking Up the Israeli Conventions of Teacher Training". She demonstrated with statistics the challenges faced by non-native English speaking teacher (NNEST) trainees, regarding proficiency at entry and exit of teacher training programs, and the challenges that lay ahead. Dr. Lifshitz suggested that proficiency levels of NNESTs are critical for teacher retention in the schools, in a system where teachers are aging, and more than 40% of newly qualified English teachers never even enter the school system upon graduation. The talk was followed by a Q&A session with two student teachers who discussed whether a college proficiency course gets the job done.

Following the morning sessions, participants divided into 3 discussion groups: Proficiency, Methodology and Linguistics. They discussed changes that could be taken by each of these areas, to positively impact upon the proficiency of future NNESTs.

The afternoon session was expertly led by Professor Penny Ur, who discussed "Research and the Language Teacher." Prof. Ur asserted that "research is not the main source of teacher knowledge, but it can enrich it." She stated that it contributes to teaching in three ways:

1. By producing evidence, that can be used to create practical principles for teaching.
2. By providing new insights / information that would not have occurred to teachers otherwise.
3. By contradicting inaccuracies in methodology or firmly held theoretical beliefs.

Prof. Ur provided numerous examples of why research is regarded so highly by the academia and ministries of education, and yet is often seen as trivial, irrelevant or impractical by teachers in the field. The sheer quantity of literature is overwhelming, and therefore needs to be read selectively and critically. She suggested that if we want pre- and in-service teachers to read research, there is a need for 'mediators' (chiefly teacher trainers) who can mediate the research and translate it into practical guidelines for teachers.

The day closed with an open discussion led by Prof. Ur and a thirst for more discussion and, dare I say, action. As Garton and Richards (2008) have commented, "professional development takes place through professional conversation." This was truly a day of Professional Development at the inaugural Teacher Training & Development SIG event.

References

Garton, S & Richards, K. (2008). Professional Encounters in TESOL: Discourses of Teachers in Teaching. Palgrave Macmillan

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*This article was originally published on Jane's blog "Route CPD for ELT"
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