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Ana Bratkovic

Welcome I'm interviewing Rufus James teacher trainer about ELT qualifications. Welcome Rufus.

Rufus James

Thanks Anna, hi everybody.

Ana Bratkovic

I'd like to start by asking you what are the key features of certificate courses in TESOL that prepare the novice teacher for their time in the classroom?

Rufus James

I think every course is really different for a start but it's really important to bear in mind that most people who start and do an initial teacher training course have absolutely zero teaching experience and so one of the things that I believe a teacher training course does for new teachers is to expose them to the complexities of teaching it's not just about the learning the language skills and learning the language systems that is important but there are so many more things that an initial teacher training course does off the top of my head yes introduction to skills and systems language analysis making sure their job ready they understand their rights and responsibilities in the workplace analysis of materials course books technology I guess it's a real taster for what happens when you really go into the classroom and when the teaching really begins but the most important element for me is a opportunity for them to get into the classroom and teach real students and I guess being able to teach

real students their first experience of that is is teaching in a practicum setting how important is the practicum for the novice teacher I think the practicum is the most important part of an initial teacher training course without that it's purely theoretical and we all know people who are excellent at studying but are not great at putting things into practice and I think as a teacher you need to be exposed to the trials and tribulations of teaching real-life people and all of the challenges and rewards that that throws up yeah my experience is that teacher training courses in general are full of peaks and troughs and the practicum more so if possible and people who come in at the beginning and they're doing a really really good job will have a time when they lose their confidence they start to question themselves but the support of their colleagues the support of the students their teaching the reflection that should be a part of a practicum and the support of the teach trainer that mimics what we get in the real classroom so it's not just going into a class and teaching people it's everything that that stands for being a colleague being part of the industry being a voice and a mentor and a leader.

Ana Bratkovic

Yes, that's so important and it really does that experience of having peaks and troughs it really does mirror what it's like to be a teacher doesn't mean we all know that even the most expert teachers will have peaks and troughs

Rufus James

yeah that's right and I guess something else that it makes me think of is that in a short of leash or period of time let's say it could be from a month's intensive course up to eight or nine months part-time those peaks and troughs in many ways they mimic the whole career of a teacher, you suddenly start to feel really confident about things and you've done your research and you know that activity works really well and so

you're feeling really great about yourself and then suddenly you swing down to being a novice again because you haven't done that before and I think one of the great things about the industry is that we don't just do a teacher training course and then we're a teacher and we can sit back on our laurels and relax that initial teach training course should expose us to the reality that for the rest of our career ideally we are learning we are excited we are supporting each other we are being supported you know it's it's a never-ending process.

Ana Bratkovic

Thank you throughout your career because you you're not only a teacher now you're a teacher trainer and you do assessment work and you do other work in the educational context. Tell us about the sorts of courses that you studied over the time of your career as you developed from a beginning or novice teacher to an experienced or professional teacher and teacher trainer that you are today.

Rufus James

So, it's interesting looking back over my long and varied career as a teacher I guess I've always been the kind of person that says yes to every opportunity for a start so when professional development has been offered to me I've always accepted it whether or not it's been immediately relevant to the world that I'm in now and I think that stood me in good stead so I initially the first course that I did following my initial teacher training course was a counselling course because I realized that I needed to apply boundaries to my work with refugees and asylum seekers that led me on to mentoring other teachers and doing further studies in the UK subject specialists focusing on ESL I did the Delta which was a fantastic course very practical and then coming to Australia I kind of as so many people do I fell into management and leadership and I had lots of experience teaching in a variety of different contexts but I had very very little

experience managing people and I did the IDLTM course that was a fantastic cause both for novice and experienced managers and I was lucky enough to have both of those aspects on the course that I had our since then I've done an auditing course through NEAS that was very interesting a very different perspective on things and I've done a lot of train the trainer courses as well too I guess specialized a little bit but also refresh my knowledge and my understanding of what it's like to be a novice teacher and I think for me the important thing is that I've never stopped learning I've never stopped feeling that I have a thirst or a hunger to to know more yeah

Ana Bratkovic

And what sort of advice would you give someone now who's let's say they've been teaching for a while and they're thinking they're now at the time when they're reflecting on where they're at what they've achieved and they're reflecting forwards looking forward to the sorts of options that they may have to do other things within our our wonderful industry what what advice would you give someone like that?

Rufus James

Well, of course attend the NEAS conference but apart from that the great thing about our industry is that there are so many different opportunities it doesn't have to be teaching it doesn't have to be management you can get into student services you can get into the marketing department the first piece of advice I guess for me would be to encourage people to consider what they're non-negotiable values are what do you want in your workplace what are things that you will not compromise in your next position or your next workplace or with your next group of colleagues I think if your values and those of the organization you work with a congruent whatever position you will be in you'll get something from, so no I guess know yourself and

then find the place that works with you.

Ana Bratkovic

Thank you all right well thanks very much it was a pleasure to speak with you today.

Rufus James

Thanks Anna always a pleasure.

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