

Trinity CertTESOL

Study Resource 4: Preparing for your Teaching Practice for CertTESOL

The CertTESOL provides challenging training both for those who are novices to teaching, and for experienced teachers who would like to gain an international qualification and hone their teaching skills.

This module is designed to raise your awareness of some of the key issues that you'll need to think about in relation to Teaching Practice on the CertTESOL, and to encourage you to reflect on them before you start the course. Doing so now means that you'll be more prepared for the TP process involves, and have a greater understanding of what is expected of you once the course begins. It will also help to ensure that you get the most out of the TP experience as a whole.

INTRODUCTION

Just like learning to drive or to play an instrument, at first there are so many things to remember about teaching that it seems difficult to imagine being able to do them all at the same time in a class. However, just like driving and playing an instrument, it becomes second nature through study and practice.

It's completely normal to have some of these thoughts:

- What if the learners don't understand what I'm trying to teach them?
- How do I keep my nerves under control yet still come across as confident?
- What if a learner asks me a question that I can't answer?
- How do I know if what I've planned is suitable and interesting for my group of learners?

Teaching Practice (TP) forms the backbone of any Trinity CertTESOL course, which you might think is hardly surprising, given that the end goal of the course is you will be ready to teach professionally. Standing up in front of a group of learners for the first time can be daunting for even the most confident of people, especially when you know you're being watched and evaluated by others. During the course you'll complete a minimum of six hours of assessed TP with at least two different groups of ESOL learners, where you'll be observed by your course tutors and sometimes your peers.

BEFORE THE LESSON

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”

Benjamin Franklin

PREPARATION, PREPARATION, PREPARATION!

Like many activities in life, making sure you prepare well is a major key to ensuring success. As far as TP is concerned, there are lots of things that you can do before the lesson to make sure you're well prepared. Below are some of the key areas that you will need to cover:

Preparing the lesson

At the beginning of the course your tutors will often start you off by providing you with the teaching material and/or ideas for your first TP. As the course progresses, you will be expected to develop your own ideas and materials for TP, but your tutors will always be on hand to offer you their support and guidance.

There will usually be a specific time set aside for lesson preparation during which you will be able to ask pick your tutors' brains as well as those of your peers. The experience and knowledge that your tutors have of teaching English is invaluable, so don't hesitate to ask for their help when planning your lessons.

Top Tip 1

Make a list of any questions that you plan to ask your course tutors before you meet with them so that you can make the most of the time. Don't forget to take notes during the meeting!

Writing the lesson plan

The lesson plan is a written document where you map out what language and/or skills you intend to cover during the lesson (i.e. the aims of the lesson) and how you intend to do so (i.e. the activities that the learners will be engaged in to help them achieve these aims). In many ways, the lesson plan represents a mental picture of the thought and preparation that you have put into the lesson and how you envisage it unfolding in reality - although, of course, things don't always go according to plan. In such instances you'll need to be flexible and prepared to respond to the learning context accordingly. What this really means is that while your lesson plan is an important working document that provides you with a clear framework to follow, you shouldn't feel obliged to stick to it rigidly at all costs. You'll need to have one copy of your lesson plan for the tutor who is observing you and one for yourself so that you can refer to it during the lesson.

Top Tip 2

Think carefully about what you want the learners to achieve by the end of the lesson. When writing your lesson plan, remember to make your outcomes 'SMART' i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-related.

(For more on lesson planning, see Study Resource 6.)

Organizing your Resources

Make a list of all the resources that you're going to need for your lesson. If you're using printed handouts, make sure that you have enough copies for all the learners in the group as well as copies to share for those people observing you. It's a good idea to include some extra copies just in case any new learners turn up unexpectedly on the day.

If you're using any type of electrical equipment then make sure you've checked that it's all fully functional beforehand and that you're comfortable with using it. Don't assume that it works! This may seem like an obvious point but you'd be surprised how many people encounter problems with electrical equipment during TP.

Top Tip 4

It's a good idea to get to the room you're teaching in as early as possible so that you can set up any equipment you plan to use and organize your resources how you want them. This means you'll be able to calmly welcome and settle the learners as they arrive.

Mentally Rehearsing your Lesson

Many great sportspeople, entertainers, politicians and renowned speakers often talk about the importance of visualizing and mentally rehearsing the event beforehand. Mental rehearsal involves imagined, mental practice of performing a task as opposed to actual practice. As the saying goes, "Practice makes perfect." Because mental practice is perfect practice, it is also a confidence-booster. Experiencing success increases confidence, even if that experience is imagined, which means that when it comes to the TP itself you will feel more confident that you are going to do well.

Top Tip 5

Once you've finished planning your lesson, set aside some time to mentally rehearse it. Visualize the room where you'll be teaching and the learners all fully engaged in the tasks you have set. Consult your lesson plan and talk things through out loud if it helps.

DURING THE LESSON

"A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." Winston Churchill

BEING OBSERVED

Even for the most diehard optimists amongst us, being observed during your TP can be an anxious and sometimes stressful experience at first, especially when you know you're being assessed on your performance. But it needn't be like this, and as the words of Churchill above suggest, the way in which you perceive an event plays a large part in how you actually experience it.

Here are some practical suggestions on how to cope with being observed:

Using your Body Language Positively

A statistic that is often quoted when it comes to body language is that 93% of communication between people is non-verbal. If we assume this to be true, this means that our tone of voice, eye movement, posture, hand gestures and facial expressions all have an important role to play in projecting a positive and confident image of ourselves to our learners. Think about how you use your body language when communicating and if possible try to get someone to video a snippet of you 'in action' that you can use to reflect on. Even using a recording on a good quality mobile phone will be a helpful starting point for you to develop your self-awareness.

Top Tip 6

Think of someone who you really admire and pay close attention to the ways in which they use their body language. If it is someone famous you might even find it helpful to access a video clip of them via YouTube. Are there aspects of their body language that you might wish to incorporate into your 'teacher image'?

Using Humour

Humour is an excellent icebreaker and an effective antidote in lowering anxiety levels. If you're able to have a laugh with your learners it will create a more relaxed and enjoyable working environment and endear you to them. That doesn't mean to say that you have to be a stand-up comedian with a list of clever jokes at your disposal- Just be yourself! Besides, most jokes are quite culturally specific and often linguistically complex, so not really suitable for a lot of ESOL learners.

Time & Timing

Our speech tends to speed up when we're nervous. If you feel this happening, take a deep breath and take time to compose yourself before speaking. It's important to take it slowly and to make sure that your learners understand you. Reading their body language is often a helpful indicator and don't be afraid to ask them if you're talking too quickly for them. They'll soon let you know!

'Timing' is different to time in the sense that it is all about doing things at the right time. For example, when giving instructions to a group of learners you need to make sure that you have the attention of the whole group before starting. Another example of timing might be knowing when the right time to wrap up an activity is. In both of these scenarios reading your learners' body language and using your own effectively is crucial.

Top Tip 7

Before giving instructions try using some simple "crowd control" phrases to get everyone's attention (e.g. "Ok everybody", "Now, can I get your attention for a moment", etc). As you do so, take a look around the classroom and make eye contact with the whole group. Don't start talking until you are sure you have everybody's attention. Don't be afraid to stand there quietly, silence is an often underused yet powerful technique for managing a classroom.

Be Prepared for the Unexpected

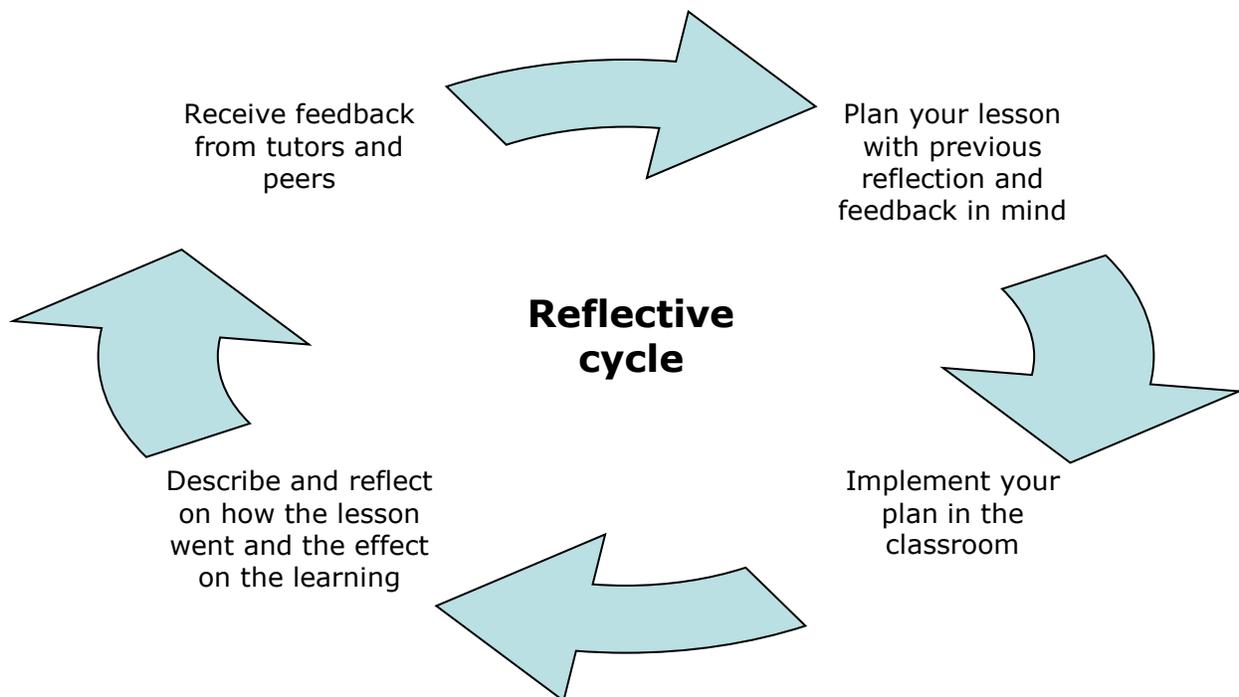
Don't panic if something doesn't go according to plan - that's completely normal. Your learners are all individuals with differing backgrounds, abilities and learning styles, so it is highly likely that some will be able to process information and make sense of it much more quickly than others. Coping with this in a real classroom situation is something that you will find helpful to discuss with your course tutors before the lesson. It's always good to have a backup plan (e.g. an alternative or additional activity for learners to do) just in case.

AFTER THE LESSON: REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

“Study without reflection is a waste of time; reflection without study is dangerous.”
Confucius

Reflection, Reflection, Reflection!

The concept of reflection underpins any teacher training or development programme. But what does reflection really mean? Reflection is essentially all about thinking critically (not in a negative sense!) about the teaching and learning processes that you and your learners are involved in and evaluating what works effectively and why in order to make you a better teacher.



During TP you'll be encouraged to reflect on both your own teaching and that of your peers whilst observing them in the classroom. The following is a list of some questions that you can ask yourself to help you to reflect on your TP:

- What do I think I achieved during the lesson?
- What am I most proud of?
- Did my students learn what I intended?
- Were my students productively engaged in the activities?
- Was I satisfied with my planning, selection of resources and strategies?
- What have I learnt about the class, the individual students or teaching strategies?

- What worked/didn't work? Why? Why not?
- What could I have done better?
- What have I discovered about myself?
- What happened that I didn't expect to happen?
- If I could teach this lesson again, what would I do differently? Why?
- What is the key thing that I want to improve for next time?
- What do I need to do to bring about this improvement?

RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Common practice for most teacher educators/trainers in the feedback discussion after the lesson is to start off by asking you how you felt about the lesson before sharing their feedback with you. Here are some suggestions on how you can best prepare for the feedback session:

Stay Calm and Detached

Try to remain as objective about your lesson as possible and avoid reacting defensively if your tutors or peers make a comment that you disagree with or see as a criticism. It is best not to respond to each point but rather to listen quietly, hearing what the experiences of your peers were, and asking only for clarification. See the feedback session as an opportunity to enhance your knowledge and skills and treat all comments as constructive criticism.

Don't be Afraid to Ask

Ask for clarification if you're not sure about any of the oral or written feedback. Remember that your tutors are often highly experienced teachers themselves and sometimes they might unconsciously use a term that is unfamiliar to you or make a comment that requires further explanation. Don't be afraid to say you don't understand something or ask them to give you an example of what they mean.

Keeping a Record of the Discussion

Take lots of notes so that you have a record of the key points that were discussed. Alternatively, you might even want to think about using a digital voice recorder so that you can listen to the discussion again at a later point. However, if you do decide to use a voice recorder, make sure you check with all those involved in the discussion beforehand that they are happy for you to record it.

Future Action Points

Your observing tutor usually makes a list of key areas for future development to emerge from the lesson. Spend some time thinking about these and how you plan to tackle them. Once again, don't be afraid to ask others for their thoughts and ideas.

GIVING FEEDBACK TO OTHERS

"Do unto others as you would have them do to you." Luke 6:31

When observing peers teaching it can be challenging to maintain a balance between making positive comments and identifying those areas of the teaching and learning experience that could be improved on. Below are some suggestions to help you:

Balanced, sensitive and constructive

It can be easy to find fault in somebody else's teaching, but remember that you too will be on the receiving end of feedback on your own teaching from your peers. So, tread carefully and try to be balanced about highlighting the positives as well as making constructive comments about how your peers might like to think about doing something differently.

Try not to make purely evaluative or judgmental comments. Overtly critical comments can be off-putting and could dent the person's confidence considerably. Try to avoid 'offering solutions' i.e. "Well, this is what I think you should have done", unless specifically invited to do so.

Think about what they did well and why it was successful. Remember that pointing out strengths is as helpful as recognizing and describing what seem to be the challenges faced by the person teaching. Make a note of three things that you enjoyed/found interesting about the lesson. Identify a technique and/or an activity in the lesson that you would like to use in your own teaching

Top Tip 7

When you're reflecting on your TP and that of others, it can be helpful to try to see things from the eyes of the learners. Doing so means that you are less likely to analyse the events from a very personal viewpoint and focus exclusively on the teacher's perspective. Ask one of your peers to follow the progress of one or perhaps two learners for the duration of the lesson and then share notes at the end of the lesson.

We hope you have enjoyed this introduction to Teaching Practice on the Trinity CertTESOL course and found it useful.