

## The Relevance of Teachers' Practical Knowledge in the Development of Teacher Education Programs

La relevancia del conocimiento práctico de los profesores en el desarrollo de programas de formación de profesores

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Teacher education programs have evolved mostly from the scholarly world's perspective, which can eventually impact the work that practitioners face on an everyday basis, particularly in regard to dealing with their students. This article of reflection addresses aspects related to a Brazilian teacher's personal practical knowledge and the role of practitioners' expertise in dealing with adolescent students (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders). It advocates that teachers' personal practical knowledge is likely to evolve into professional knowledge provided that it is analyzed, verified, and improved. Insights from second language teacher education, reflexive thoughts, and projects developed by the author illustrate what can be considered when developing strategies that are consistent with the envisioned teacher education programs.

*Key words:* English language teaching, personal practical knowledge, second language teacher education.

Los programas de formación de maestros han evolucionado sobre todo desde la perspectiva del mundo académico, lo que eventualmente puede impactar en el trabajo que los maestros enfrentan cotidianamente, particularmente en lo que respecta al trato con sus estudiantes. Este artículo de reflexión aborda aspectos relacionados con el conocimiento práctico personal de una maestra brasileña y el papel de la experiencia de los practicantes en el trato con estudiantes adolescentes (6° a 9° grado). Defiende que el conocimiento práctico personal de los profesores pueda evolucionar hacia el conocimiento profesional siempre que se analice, verifique y mejore. Las reflexiones sobre la formación de maestros de segunda lengua, los pensamientos reflexivos y los proyectos desarrollados por la autora ilustran lo que se puede considerar al desarrollar estrategias que sean consistentes con los programas deseados de formación de maestros.

*Palabras clave:* alumnado, conocimiento práctico personal, educación de maestros de segunda lengua, enseñanza de lengua inglesa.

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## Introduction

Teacher education programs have long and in many different contexts evolved solely from the scholarly world's perspective, which is influential on policymakers' decisions. Such decisions are likely to eventually impact on the very work that practitioners face on an everyday basis, particularly in regard to dealing with young students. This is probably due to the fact that concepts that broadly address how youngsters learn do not seem to reach the basics of what pre-service teachers will when in their actual classrooms. Approaching learners' needs through practitioners' expertise may be a good alternative to reaching a portion of teacher education programs that is still to be fairly covered.

In this reflective manuscript, the reader is invited to consider aspects related to practitioners' personal drives as well as their practical knowledge, which can be developed in and with academia. More specifically, it is my intent to borrow concepts that are well developed in the field of applied linguistics and which are addressed by second language teacher education (SLTE) programs in order to improve teacher education in general as well.

I am a Brazilian English language teacher and an independent researcher working in behalf of SLTE. The perspective that I adopt is grounded on an ethnographic study developed through my engagement in a regular public school context.

After having worked for over ten years as a second language teacher educator and after having deepened my understanding of what English language teaching (ELT) is like in my setting, I decided to immerse and undergo the business of teaching youngsters in public schools. This move has reinforced my awareness toward the lack of experience that teacher educators reveal when approaching contemporary student bodies. Such revelation has also unveiled practitioners' lack of proper theoretical background, which is essential in informing their practice. Based on this idea, I argue that teacher educators' development should count both on experience and on collaboration, just like pre-service teachers and

practitioners do when undergoing training. Relying on more experienced practitioners' personal practical knowledge (PPK) could be a way towards integrating and valuing teaching theory and practice.

## Background

Being culturally and socially immersed in teaching contexts that had previously been just experienced through observation has definitely become a unique opportunity that I availed myself of as a person and as an ELT professional. Almost two decades in the academic setting were both challenging and disturbing in the sense that many of the theoretical and practical instances would seldom converse. Quitting the academia therefore was an even more challenging path I decided to take in order to meet the more practical issues related to teaching.

Theoretical and practical issues fused when aspects related to the composition of student body started to make sense (Kennedy, 1991). According to Mary M. Kennedy, the former director of the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning (NCRTL), demographic changes in the student body was a major demand on teachers after the 1980s. The main explanation for such finding of the study, developed by the NCRTL during the decade of 1986-1996, was that teachers were then working with students whom they had traditionally had the most difficulty in dealing with; that is, "students whose families are poor, whose language is not English, whose race or cultural background differ from their teachers" (Kennedy, 1991, p. 5).

Contextually speaking, it is possible to assert that after almost three decades of adjustments to a globalized society, the Brazilian student body has reached its peculiar features, which can somehow be related to contemporary demands and to the agenda proposed by the NCRTL (Kennedy, 1991). Taken from a local perspective, it is fair to request that teacher educators and policymakers approach practitioners' and young citizens' needs, considering that they are, ultimately, the ones to be affected by the demands of a changing world.

As a current participant and one affected by the demands of this changing world, in the following section I share my informed insider's viewpoint, hoping that it is a consistent contribution to be examined.

### Personal Drives and Practical Knowledge Development

The personal/professional turn I took after obtaining my doctoral degree in applied linguistics is the foreground of this study. After sixteen years working mostly in private academic settings, both as an English language instructor and as a second language teacher educator, including the prime design/coordination of Humanities-English language undergraduate programs and teaching graduate students, it seemed that the time to touch the grounds of basic public education had arrived. Influenced by specialists who assert that ELT in public school settings (primary and secondary) around the globe are understudied (Borg, 2003), and following the need for a better understanding of teachers' cognitions (Borg, 2006; Feryok, 2010; Freeman, 2002; Johnson, 2006, 2009; Oss, 2013; Vieira-Abrahão, 2012; Woods, 1996, 2009), I decided to answer a personal practical knowledge development call (Golombek, 1998, 2009).

Borg's (2003) remarks were part of my main inspiration for quitting the higher education academic setting and moving into the grounds of basic education classrooms. Borg points to the lack of studies that address contexts "where languages are taught by nonnative teachers to large classes of learners who, particularly in the case of English, may not be studying the language voluntarily" (p. 106). This was identified as the case of Brazilian basic education in most regular school settings.

In order to meet with the actual grounds of ELT, the first step I took was to join the educational system by becoming a public servant and being appointed to teach primary levels. Holding a public job and teaching preadolescents had not yet been part of my profes-

sional background. As a newcomer to the business of teaching public primary school students I had to adapt my teacher educator's experience in order to become a youngsters' English language teacher. It has been a fortunate venture—for the good and for the bad.

The good part of the new endeavor was definitely having the chance to put into practice the things that I used to suggest to my former future teacher students. By doing that, I brought myself to the point of verifying what theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical aspects could actually be used in my own everyday teaching. Another captivating facet of becoming a youngsters' English language teacher is related to the rapport that was established with students. It is really amazing to observe how much pupils can be willing to engage in the projects proposed and how rewarding their participation can be, as is described later in this paper. Students' receptiveness seems particularly surprising perhaps due to the low expectations I brought as an outsider. Understanding what ELT is like in regular schools of the public sector takes much more than language teaching, I further realized. It was also surprising that students who were not in any of my classes would also appreciate greetings and small talks in English, as we ran into each other in the school halls. Interacting in English on a more casual basis seemed to be a good strategy to have the kids become more familiar with the so-called foreign language. That seems to influence not only the students but also the school staff, from peer teachers to employees in general. The mere sight of "the English teacher" around school premises was likely to afford nice "good mornings!" and "how are you today?" which is definitely rewarding to both parties.

As for the "bad" share of the venture, it is relevant to mention that one of the sad findings that I eventually came across is the fact that not all English language teachers actually speak English. This understanding was first elaborated based on students' and peer teachers' testimonials and, later, on discouraging attempts to interact in English with English language teachers.

Surprisingly, and even though I was aware of the fact that not all English language practitioners were proficient in the language, the judgment I had previously made was somehow inaccurate. Although some of my colleagues did not actually feel comfortable speaking English for whatever reason, they did manage to encourage their pupils to do so. Apparently, and despite all hindrances usually posed by teaching contexts, the daily interaction with the school setting and with the students is likely to compensate for some aspects addressed by SLTE programs, which usually focus on the theoretical elements of teaching to the detriment of the more functional ones (Buarque, 2015; Gatti, 2014).

Despite all the expertise that I have developed over the years, this move has been very precise in its proving that “good teaching is easier to talk about than to do” (Kennedy, 1991, p. 4), particularly when it comes to dealing with youngsters whose social needs and skills have changed even more rapidly over the past twenty-or-so years. It is my understanding that meeting demands from contemporary student bodies should be added to teacher educators’ learning curricula in order to be properly addressed by teacher learning research and eventually by teacher education syllabi. In the following section, I refer to some elements that are likely to impact the design of teacher education programs.

### A Practitioner’s Perspective

The journey into ELT in Brazilian public schools described here has been influenced by specialists and professors, institutional duties and conferences, beliefs and doubts; but mostly, it has been inspired by the former English language undergraduate and graduate students I used to teach, many of which were already teaching under temporary contracts. To those who so generously shared their lived stories I owe all my respect and motivation which enabled me to have made such a daring professional move.

Specialists are also inspirational when it comes to challenging practitioners’ experiences and acknow-

ledging that they “can enrich the knowledge base of L2 teacher education precisely because it is generated in and emerges out of teachers’ lived experiences” (Johnson, 2009, p. 23). Nonetheless, the greatest challenge relies on the actual sharing of such lived experiences “with the goal of making it shareable among teachers, open for discussion, verification, and refutation or modification” (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002, p. 7).

There are many aspects that prevent practitioners’ experiences to be shared. One of them may be the fact that school teachers usually have to prioritize everyday assignments, such as bureaucratic records, classes preparation, correction, feedback, meetings, planning, reports, and so on, besides personal and professional development issues. In case the teacher actually enrolls in a long term professional development program, readings, research, publishing, and so forth are usually added to the school teachers’ tasks. In the case of Brazilian teachers, it is fair to mention that most of them/us lack the time and funding to engage in teacher education programs that demand publications, which may prevent relevant and invaluable experience to be shared. ELT practitioners are therefore left with defective representations of knowledge due to lack of examples that could have stemmed from theory (Hiebert et al., 2002). This may be one of the facts that prevail in keeping many Brazilian educational settings as they are.

Cox and Assis-Peterson (2008) assert that teacher education programs in Brazil rely much more on theory than on more practical aspects of teaching. According to these specialists, undergraduates are subject to an overdose of theories that are not in accordance with what pre-service teachers can grasp once they are on their own (Cox & Assis-Peterson, 2008). The scholars also point to the fact that SLTE should adopt a more collaborative approach, and investigate *with* practitioners instead of doing research *about* them. Cox and Assis-Peterson’s (2008) self-criticism argues that

What we discovered through research in the natural classroom context is not addressed to those who have donated their words,

their experiences, their anguish, their hopes, but [it is addressed] to our academia peers. We report/publish what we saw/heard behind these subjects' backs and not in a co-authoring fashion and often we hide our interpretations from them because we are afraid of hurting their feelings. We cannot spare to make a self-criticism—with this spirit, our contribution to solving the chronic crisis of ELT is nil. (p. 51, my translation)

Granting practitioners the conditions to become part of the actual enrichment of the knowledge base of SLTE would mean recognizing their lived experiences (Bruner, 1997, 1998; Johnson, 2009; Oss, 2013; Telles, 2002) as an actual source of sharable knowledge. One would never really know what an educational setting is like until one lives the experience of being part of it and dealing with its daily routines. There is a great gap between what has to be done in an ELT classroom and what is doable. Considering the viewpoint from where I stand, I would say filling this gap may be particularly challenging to be addressed by teacher educators, especially because dealing with the demands of contemporary student bodies is perhaps one of the farthest topics that teacher education programs have handled. Moreover, future teachers may not be sufficiently aware of the major public expectations that fall on them, unless these are addressed through teacher education curricula. Suggestions on how to overcome such hindrances are explored in the following section.

### **Teacher Education and Personal Practical Knowledge: The Student Body**

Adolescence is a period of life which all school teachers have already been through; taken from that point, developing approaches to deal with teenagers should not mean much of a contention. Nevertheless, it seems that teacher education programs lack the foreground needed to meet demands of contemporary student bodies. Investing time and effort in developing such expertise could mean calling on practitioners'

personal practical knowledge (Golombek, 1998, 2009), and having SLTE eventually include it in their programs.

Hiebert et al. (2002) regard practitioners' knowledge as teachers' craft knowledge, which may develop into professional knowledge as long as it is publicized, shared, and stored, as well as verified and improved. From that perspective, one may assert that practitioners' personal practical knowledge is unlikely to become professional knowledge due, exactly, to what Cox and Assis-Peterson (2008) posit as self-criticism. According to the Brazilian teacher educators, it seems that practitioners' craft knowledge is actually publicized with the legitimate intention of being shared and stored. However, the steps of verification and improvement seem to be aborted at some point of the process, which prevents the cycle from moving further. By not advancing, it seems that this professional knowledge cycle is accomplished for one precise reason: researchers' publications. The party which would actually be able to verify and improve personal practical knowledge, and therefore help develop it into professional knowledge is oftentimes withdrawn from the process. Such viewpoint corroborates Cox and Assis-Peterson's (2008) assertion: "We report/publish what we saw/heard behind these subjects' backs and not in a co-authoring fashion" (p. 51).

The perspective of SLTE seems to follow the same course, which in many ways neglects the sociocultural aspects of learning to teach (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson, 2006; Johnson & Golombek, 2011; Lantolf, 2011), which also happens in Brazilian settings (Leffa, 1999, 2011; Miccoli, 2011; Oss, 2013; Vieira-Abrahão, 2012). Relying only on teacher education programs and on learning on a trial and error basis shall leave teachers too far behind in terms of professional development, particularly if one considers how fast teenagers learn and develop. Being deprived of learning from reports or case studies, for instance, is likely to keep pre-service teachers from being able to produce and share and therefore benefit from basic skills that teacher education programs may disregard: reading and studying and



relying on more experienced peers, who in turn can encourage pre-service teachers to do the same. In that respect, it could also be inspirational to follow Snow's words (as cited in Hiebert et al., 2002) when referring to American teachers: "They must operate in a system that allows them to treat ideas for teaching as objects that can be shared and examined publicly, that can be stored and accumulated and passed along to the next generation" (p. 7).

Although it may seem commonsensical that local and social features change from community to community, which is the case of Brazil and its continental dimensions, learning about adolescents and their characteristics could be a way to unfold current issues that may be crucial to primary and secondary students' lives these days. Learners' age range and characteristics that preteenagers and teenagers present at this precise moment of their lives is thus a current subject matter that cannot be disregarded by teacher education syllabi, exactly because adolescents do share common affective, intellectual, physical, and social features, no matter where they come from.

In a Brazilian study conducted with secondary school students, Oss (2006) relies on Dörnyei's (1990) broader concept of integrative motivation to address adolescent students' willingness to learn English at school. According to Dörnyei's construct, both instrumental and integrative motivations concur when the learning of a target language takes place away from its context of use, mostly due to challenges involved, need for achievement, and interest in different cultures, which broadened the integrative concept of motivation. This broadened concept of integrative motivation turned out to be the main drive for the 14- to 18-year-olds that collaborated in Oss's investigation (2006). According to the study, although instrumental motivation played an important role in students' willingness to learn English at school, learners were particularly interested in languages in general, in foreigners and in their cultures as well as in integrating

into a new community. This last item, however, did not indicate any geographical region in particular, but the linguistic community of the target language that could be reached through the World Wide Web.

In that same respect, Pescador (2010) conducted an investigation that aimed at identifying and characterizing learning actions used by digital natives while interacting when playing online games in English. According to the researcher, the study indicates that learning possibilities unfold as digital technologies aid students in surpassing classroom walls. As such, real interactions and new vocabulary stem from students' new skills and learning styles developed from the use of technological gadgets (Pescador, 2010).

Students' interests in integrating into new communities and developing new skills and learning styles are just a few features that can be addressed by teacher education programs, Brazilian SLTE ones included. Even though many institutions do address knowledge of learners and their characteristics as current issues of teachers-to-be education curricula, improving the quality and outcomes at the primary and secondary levels is still an urgent demand. For that matter, Pescador (2010) reminds us that

neuroscience studies indicate that, in response to constant stimuli elicited by digital technologies, this generation has developed some sophisticated skills which affect their ways of thinking, such as parallel processing, random access, among others (Johnson, 2005), and this cannot be ignored by school-teachers, due to its learning potentials. (p. 93)

Sharing some personal practical knowledge and focusing on contemporary student bodies can help unveil crucial issues that are worth addressing in teacher education programs. Based on experience and on expertise developed outside academic contexts, in the next section I refer to two projects I developed aimed at meeting students' expectations in terms of learning English at school.

## Theories and Methodologies in Action

Becoming a public servant appointed to teach primary levels turned out to be a fine challenge to accept. Teaching English language to 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders in one or two 45-minute classes per week could have meant not meeting many expectations. Moreover, as I became familiar with the teaching syllabus proposed by the school board (Zanette, Rui, & Pellin de Bastiani, 2010), it was clear that the material displayed in the document was developed to merely fulfill institutional requirements, which in turn allowed practitioners to approach their teaching in the best way they found appropriate to meet students' needs and wants, provided that they had been instructed to do so.

In order to benefit from and to conform to the guidelines, the approach adopted relied on projects aimed at meeting the basics, according to each grade, group, and, ideally, individuals. By doing that, it was possible to address methods that some of my former future teacher students had adopted under my supervision—and which I would not necessarily agree with—as well as to experience their efficiency in my own teaching context.

There were some projects developed with different levels of students that I would consider worth reporting, mainly due to students' outcomes and testimonials. In the following subsections, I briefly outline two of them.

### New Perspectives Project

I developed this project (Oss, 2015) as an extra-class activity offered to 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders in a school unit where ELT was offered once a week, in 45-minute classes. The idea of having ELT as an extra-class activity was suggested by some of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students, who enjoyed the classes that we were having in the regular school hours. As the idea was also mentioned to 7<sup>th</sup> graders, many of them became interested as well.

The first step I took to provide students with extra classes was to request it formally to the school board,

which included a term of responsibility asserting that I would not charge the school extra hours for the classes. It took around three months for the school board to respond and finally have the classes authorized in a volunteer work fashion.

The school principal offered a room that was being used as a storage room, which turned into a nice classroom after some of my contacts in the social networks donated rugs, pillows, books, posters, dictionaries, and even a TV set and a VHS player. By the time the classes were actually allowed to start, our classroom was already a nice and cozy place, as can be seen in the presentation<sup>1</sup> delivered in a local seminar.

The name of the project—*New Perspectives*—was inspired by a combination of the idea that had been triggered by students' request, and later based on the classroom design and teaching approach envisioned. The classes started after winter break of 2014 and had a total of 30 students enrolled, both 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders. The extra class activity was developed for 15 weeks, in a 1 hour, 15 min period, both for the morning and afternoon students. Although not all of them attended all classes, 24 students were regular attendees.

Considering that it was the students' initiative, the whole project was based on their cooperation. Students who had parents' authorization to be at school in the opposite school shift were invited to help organize the classroom by displaying posters and maps and by doing some cleaning in what would become the classroom. That gave the group a sense of belonging, which was already part of the "new perspective" they could foresee from manipulating English books, dictionaries, and the maps and posters, for example.

The chance to be around those students in a context apart from the regular classroom hours was also an opportunity to learn more about their interests and to become closer to them. As the project was offered to a

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<sup>1</sup> [http://prezi.com/kriyw98ssvwy/?utm\\_campaign=share&utm\\_medium=copy&rc=exoshare](http://prezi.com/kriyw98ssvwy/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=exoshare) (in Portuguese).

morning group and to an afternoon group, it was also part of the learning to give/take improvements in the room that would be shared by the two different groups as well as to respect each other's contributions.

The final design of the classroom counted three chalkboards—one on each wall, except on the one where the door was; desks—these were displayed in groups of four; posters and maps—these were always available to be explored at any time a topic so required—books and dictionaries—these were displayed on desks against the walls and free to be used anytime; and there was also a reading corner furnished with a rug and pillows.

Different from the regular classes, the view behind the *New Perspectives* was to have students experience alternative English learning ideas that came from their needs and suggestions. Working in groups on a regular basis—instead of sitting in lines and rows—was a first move toward the new experience of attending “an English course,” as students called it. In the *New Perspectives* classes, students did not have fixed places, which allowed them to have a different viewpoint in each class. Sitting in different places and working with different groups was also consistent with the teaching approach and the classroom dynamics I proposed. The three chalkboards were used during the classes and the visual references were always available, even after the explanations were finished. In order to follow the classes, students had to turn toward the board that was being used and sometimes change places, reinforcing the *New Perspectives* concept.

A syllabus was developed based on an interdisciplinary fashion and the topics were developed from the idea of having students become members of an English club, where everyone could suggest new themes based on their interests. In order to do so, the first class was devised after the processing of a form that students filled in with personal data and interests. These topics were explored during the first classes, and from then on other themes were explored such as celebrations, school subjects, family relations, likes/dislikes, which

led to vocabulary on culturally motivated themes (after Halloween and Thanksgiving, for instance), food, sports, school objects, and leisure, among others.

The final balance of the *New Perspectives* project was considered positive, particularly due to the feedback that students provided and because the objectives initially proposed were met. Moreover, it is my understanding that developing strategies to learn about socially relevant issues by relying on students' genuine interests and promoting citizenship by welcoming what they value in school should be included in the syllabus of SLTE programs.

### Learning to Read: A Collaborative Endeavor

My main objective with this teaching project was to promote students' autonomy and decision making through an alternative approach to ELT for 9<sup>th</sup> graders. My linguistic goal was to instruct my learners to develop reading strategies that could guide them through a process of getting acquainted with basic vocabulary, sentence structure, and reading comprehension. Outcomes suggest that they benefited from the approach, which encouraged them not only to develop their study skills but also to take an active part in organizing the syllabus, contributing to a research report, and helping weaker classmates, among other collaborative tasks. The project was developed during the school year of 2015, and in the following year it was granted an IATEFL Research SIG scholarship.<sup>2</sup>

Particularly important for the project is the fact that the school where it was developed is located in a socially vulnerable part of the city, where students are exposed to urban violence, drug dealing, and segregation of many sorts. The motivation to learn English in such neighborhoods is usually very low, considering the school demands that students have to deal with, their everyday lives, and the practical

<sup>2</sup> <http://resig.weebly.com/scholarship-winners-gallery.html>



purposes that are usually associated with the learning of another language, among others. The idea of proposing a collaborative endeavor came from the need to make learning English a meaningful task to these learners. On the very first day of school, the presentation of the year's program was made on a dual basis so students could either choose to work with the book and follow its units or engage in a project where they would have to read the material that had been previously selected. In order to have students feel that they were really taking part in their learning, the units of the book were displayed so they would have their choices grounded on some reliable information. Students were familiar with the book series, so they were introduced to the topics that would be addressed throughout the year. The second option was the project, which was also presented through topics and described as an opportunity that they would have to help build content based on graded readings.

In order to have a comparable prospect to the first alternative, the proposal was presented departing from topics as well: *a place to live* and *environmental issues*. In both topics, the goal was to have students engage in themes that would meet their curiosities and/or that would be close to their interests. *A place to live* included reading material about countries like Australia and New Zealand, The United States and Ireland, which are countries that in a way or another share similar aspects to Brazilian people's features (e.g., Irish happiness), historical aspects (e.g., Australian colonization), and some familiarity with its culture (e.g., American songs, films, etc.). For the topic *environmental issues*, the reading material was about pollution and recycling. These two subtopics/reading materials were chosen because the school is located near a river which is prone to pollution matters. Not only that, but there are many recycling sites in this city area, where some parents and even some of the students work.

Students chose the second option, *environmental issues*, under a democratic and justifiable poll. The ones who did not vote for the project were encouraged to respect the majority's decision, which in fact led to a good critical balance to be managed throughout the process. In the first term, besides the presentation and agreement on topics, some language reviews on sentence structure, verb tenses, word formation, dictionary work, vocabulary development, and so on, were emphasized based on the readings. During the second term, learners interacted with different types of readings: Films, documentaries, news, magazines, and so forth were introduced and explored in this period. In the last term, actual reading comprehension with technological support was implemented. All classes of this term took place in the school lab, where students read, took quizzes, worked on their individual reading comprehension activities, learned about vocabulary development/translation apps, and collaborated with their classmates.

At the end of the school year, the 29 students (16 from the morning class and 13 from the afternoon class) were requested to give feedback on the experience. According to the respondents (a total of 21), it was considered important to help decide which topics should be approached throughout the school year (20/21). They also considered that reading was a more interesting way of learning English at school than learning it in a traditional way (17/21). Nonetheless, some of the learners considered that studying English with the support of regular English manuals would have been their preference (7/21).

Based on what I have learned from the students who adopted this project, I can assert that developing alternative approaches to ELT for basic education is one of the greatest challenges that practitioners are likely to face these days. It is my contention that the personal practical knowledge developed in circumstances such as these should be encouraged and shared in SLTE programs, as I articulate in the following section.

## Reflective Thoughts

The spirit of the words shared in this manuscript is based on lived experiences and on the belief that practitioners' personal practical knowledge cannot be left aside when developing teacher education programs. SLTE programs, in particular, are likely to benefit greatly from practitioners' expertise, especially when regarding contemporary student bodies and the reasons why their idiosyncrasies should be explored. Having such understandings in mind, one is likely to see the opening of new possibilities not only in the field of teaching and its various derivations, including ELT, but also in promoting studies that can enlighten teachers' roles in a myriad of settings. Disclosing what practitioners' responsibilities are and bringing their personal practical knowledge on how to deal with adolescents in contexts such as the ones discussed in this paper can be supportive to teacher educators, who would have real study cases to refer to and real practitioners to contact if/whenever needed. That would, in turn, bring the expanding community of language learners, pre-service teachers, teacher educators, and, ideally, policymakers together, aiming at more down-to-earth guidelines and ultimately more motivated learners in general.

## Final Considerations

This manuscript has covered aspects related to SLTE from an English language teacher's perspective. It has outlined how teacher education in general is likely to benefit from practitioners' PPK, particularly in regard to developing strategies that can support teacher educators to approach contemporary student bodies.

It is relevant to mention that although the perspective adopted is personal and local, there are many learning contexts that are likely to benefit from the ideas shared in this article. Some aspects that would be worth considering from this viewpoint could be the following:

1. Learning to teach may come from teaching itself, but teaching to learn demands background knowledge

that not all teacher education programs provide learners with.

2. Practitioners' PPK may be regarded as craft knowledge just as long as there is room for teachers and pre-service teachers to actually publicize, share, store, verify, and improve it based on local demands.
3. Knowing student bodies means being aware of the role of schooling in individuals' lives and therefore promoting students' learning from an informed and straightforward perspective. In order to do that, it is the practitioners' duty to insist on the recognition of their expertise as well as to keep on studying and improving in the profession.

The topics above aim at shedding light on some aspects that can only be seen through the lenses of an insider. Although some may disagree, only those who are prone to daring moves shall grasp what it means not to take the paths already taken. That is probably what teacher education means: being ready to face the unpredictable.

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