

# Spotlight — Danielle Freitas



*Danielle Freitas is the Associate Dean of the English Language Institute at Fanshawe College, where she oversees the EAP and TESL Programs. She holds a Master's degree in Second Language Education from the University of Toronto, a Master's degree in TESOL from the University College London, and a PhD in Language and Literacies Education from the University of Toronto. Danielle also holds many ESL teaching and teacher training credentials from the University of Cambridge.*

## Tell us a little about yourself. Who is Danielle?

I would say that I am a proud non-native speaker, Latina, immigrant woman who truly believes in the power of equity, diversity, and inclusion and works to support and enable whoever I can through the power of education to reach their full potential, regardless of who they are, where they come from, and how they look and sound like. I was born and raised in Brazil and had the opportunity to learn the value of education at a very young age—my parents, as mature students, worked really hard to obtain their higher education

degrees while raising their two little kids, my brother and me, so that we could have a better life. My lived experiences as a child helped me shape my belief in the transformative power of education. I sincerely believe we educators have the power to literately transform lives, and this is a responsibility I do not take lightly. My passion and unwavering commitment to education are definitely key elements of my identity, which is why I am proud to identify myself as a lifelong learner. I am enthusiastic about learning and have no plans to stop embarking on new learning journeys!

**In 2021, you received the Canadian Society for the Study of Education Doctoral Award for your PhD thesis, *It kind of made me think: Is this the real me? Is this really who I am? A mixed methods investigation of teacher learning and teacher development in CELTA courses*. How would you explain the contribution your thesis makes to English language teaching?**

My thesis was recognized for its contributions to research on teacher education in Canada. I believe its main contribution to the fields of English language teaching and language teacher education was to shed light on how cognition and emotion are inseparable in the teacher learning and development process and how emotions play a decisive role in the classroom by influencing the way student teachers think, behave, and make decisions. By employing a three-phased enhanced exploratory sequential mixed methods research design, which involved qualitative data from CELTA programs taught in different countries and quantitative data from 880 participants from 78 countries, I was able to illustrate how student teachers' emotions signaled the emotional and cognitive contradictions they faced during



the CELTA course, and how these were mediated by the student teachers themselves, their peers, and teacher educators leading to the development of new aspects of their personality and identity as English language teachers. My research, therefore, challenges the dominance of paradigms that emphasize rationality and cognition by helping bring to light the inseparability of cognition and emotion as part of the nature of the teacher learning and development process.

**Over the years, what has been the most challenging aspect working in English language education or education in general?**

I believe it was the COVID-19 pandemic. It has undoubtedly affected our lives in myriad ways, including how we understand and perform our jobs as English language educators and administrators. It has now been almost three years since we all had to face uncertainty and re-imagine ourselves as we navigated uncharted territory, and the most challenging aspect of working on English language education has been to deal with the psychological, emotional, and physical impacts that such a global pandemic has had on our students, educators, staff, and everyone involved in the English language education field. From learning new technologies to supporting medical accommodations, our jobs have abruptly been transformed by the pandemic and are likely to continue to change as we start to live in a post-pandemic world. I do believe that the pandemic has expedited educational advancements that would have taken longer to happen in normal circumstances, and now they have already become a current and permanent part of our industry, such as technological advancements.

**As the Associate Dean of the English Language Institute at Fanshawe College since August 2022, what has been the most rewarding aspect so far of this role?**

I am thrilled to be the new Associate Dean of the English Language Institute (ELI) at Fanshawe College, and I would say that the most rewarding aspect of my role so far has been leading a team of outstandingly caring professionals who are proud to be part of a close-knit community. I have always valued the transformative power of human connections and feel inspired by the small acts of kindness and compassion I witness daily at the ELI. I look forward to continuing to learn and grow with such a special group of people.

**Your paper on Plurilingualism in TESL Programs (*Plurilingualism in TESL programs? Are we there yet?*) looks at a paradigm shift in TESOL/ TESL teacher education and the pedagogy of TESL courses in Canada. What was your takeaway from this paper? Why did you want to write it?**

The most relevant message I want educators to have from this paper is that we still have a lot of work to do to ensure that the curriculum and pedagogy of our TESOL/ TESL certificate programs are supported by the most current research in the field. TESOL/ TESL certificate programs have been qualifying English language teachers for over 60 years, and despite their importance for the English language teaching profession, little is known about these programs, as research on this context is comparatively scarce. As such, I wanted to write this paper not only to contribute to addressing the scarcity of research on this under-investigated context but also to investigate the extent to which the plurilingual paradigm shift had been adopted by the curriculum and pedagogy of a TESL Canada certificate program. Unfortunately, the findings of the study showed that the curriculum and pedagogy of this program were supported by a monolingual view of language teaching and learning, which reinforced the participant’s past learning experiences, beliefs, and teaching practice regarding language learning. I am glad to say that



since this study was conducted in 2012, I have witnessed positive changes toward the adoption of the plurilingual paradigm shift in several TESOL/TESL certificate programs.

**Are you currently involved in any research projects? What's in store for Danielle in 2023?**

I am excited about 2023, as I plan to start my Post-Doctoral studies next year. I have been working on the post-doc project and look forward to being a student again! My goal is to build on my doctoral thesis work and focus on the cultural dimension of emotions and how it influences teacher learning and development. Presently, I am involved in two other research projects. In 2023, I will continue to work on them—one project focuses on developing a research instrument to measure learning in TESOL Certificate programs and the other on online cultural exchanges and their impact on student teachers' learning and identity.

If you would like to know more, please visit [Danielle's LinkedIn](#).

***Thank you once again for your contribution, Danielle!***

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