

## Issues in Language Instruction

A Journal for Practicing and Interpreting Teaching English as an Additional Language

### PDPI Changed My Personal and Professional Life

Verônica de Oliveira França  
Integrated Public Education Center 032 Cora Coralina  
Duque de Caxias, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

#### On My Way to Being an English Teacher

A quote attributed to the French chemist, Antoine Lavoisier, is “nothing is created, nothing is lost, everything changes.” This quote characterizes my experience in the PDPI program at the University of Kansas in January and February 2023.

I studied English when I was just a teenager in a public school in Brazil. I enjoyed learning what was new and interesting, but I did not have much money to study at a university like many English teachers did. It would cost a lot, and my father worked hard just to give us food and a basic education.

When I started to work, the first thing I did was to apply to a university. I spent all the money I had to study, and I succeeded. After almost a year and a half, I found a better job which allowed me to graduate with no worries. At that point, I was working in a multinational corporation and using my English. But soon, I became a mother and my priorities changed.

It is difficult to be a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a housewife and still find time to work and earn money. I was 32 years old when I had my son. He was premature and had to be in an intensive care unit for 50 long days. By devoting so many hours to the multinational corporation, I missed my son’s first word and first steps. At that point, I decided to apply to be an English language teacher. It was the best decision for me.

#### Applying to the PDPI Program

However, after 10 years teaching English at a public elementary and high school, in Duque de Caxias, Rio de Janeiro, I felt like time had stopped. I was no longer progressing as a professional. This was when I became interested in the PDPI Program. Was it possible to go to the US? Was my English good enough? Did I have the TOEFL scores? Could it really happen? The answer “no” came too quickly to my questions. I had to believe in myself.

Unfortunately, in 2020, the COVID-19 virus was spreading and the whole world stopped, including the PDPI selection process. I believed that it was the end, but in 2022, I received an email informing me that they were re-opening the program. Fortunately, I had all the support that I needed from my family, friends, and coworkers. Even the new Director of my school supported my decision. To my surprise, I received the scholarship. It was just like a dream, and I only woke up when I put my feet on the campus of the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas, USA.

#### Participating in the PDPI Program

In this program, I studied Communicating in English and learned more about American culture and the importance of being understood. It’s all about communication. In my teaching methodology class, I learned about how to write for learning, how to do free writing, how to engage students, how to plan, how to help students build the right habits and a lot more. I also took a pronunciation class and focused on stressing the right syllable in content words and the rhythm of spoken English. In the technology class, I recorded my first podcast, and I am sure I will record more podcasts.

PDPI allowed me to visit a college, go to a basketball game, meet with a mentor, have dinner with an American family, take a tour of the state capitol of Kansas in Topeka, and learn more about US history.

PDPI was an amazing and unique experience for me. I was a dreamer. I put my dream in a hidden place in my heart and now my dream was coming true. The caterpillar was getting a chance to turn into a butterfly. Am I an expert in English now? No, but because of my English classes at the University of Kansas and my experience living in North American culture, I had the opportunity to study hard in an English-speaking country and I improved my English proficiency. Kansas has a special place in my heart!

## **How the PDPI Program Changed My English Language Instruction**

The PDPI program changed my English language instruction in so many ways. After living in the US and studying for 180 hours in only 6 weeks, I understand that to learn we have to continue to challenge ourselves professionally to create better activities and lesson plans, so they will be more attractive and engaging to our students.

I also prepare for my classes differently now. I used to plan only one activity for class, but now I have at least two or three lesson plans, one of which is always a group activity. It is very important to be prepared because our students notice this and realize that they are important and that there is a purpose.

PDPI changed my mind and my actions in the classroom and the results are for the better. Now I have hope in education again. I was once burned out from teaching for a decade at a public elementary and high school, and now I am a rejuvenated EFL professional.

## **Suggestions for the PDPI Program**

Unfortunately, PDPI is only a six-week program. It went by very quickly. Even though it was tightly scheduled and in the last few days I was very tired, if I could apply to the PDPI again, I would. However, I hope this program can make some changes. I understand the need to complete the hours, but rest is important too. Studying all day long with commitments at night can produce a lot of stress and can be demotivating. Another change that I would like to see in this program would be more financial aid to more teachers, so they, too, can have this opportunity.

## **Back Home**

Now after returning to Brazil, I am looking for a better way to teach, share, motivate and inspire my coworkers and students. They have already noticed a change in me. For example, I am now looking for a master's program to further improve my skills. I had never thought about getting a master's degree before PDPI. It sounds like a bit of a cliché, but I believe we need to be the change we want to see in the world. I'm now ready to fly higher because I am already a beautiful butterfly.