



## **TESOL Board Connect: Learning Never Ceases—A Student of Leadership**

by [\*Gabriela Kleckova\*](#)

In my 25+ years in the profession, I have served in numerous leadership roles in TESOL as well as outside TESOL. I have taken part in leadership training opportunities, read on leadership, reflected on leadership, and written on leadership. I have developed confidence in leading people and have grown with every new leadership experience, TESOL presidency being the far most educational of all of them. On the novice to expert scale (Dreyfus, 2004), I would describe myself as proficient in leadership.

### **Making Mistakes and Facing Challenges**

With any new leadership position, we face new tasks, challenges, practices, and relationships. There is always a learning curve, and mistakes are an integral and important part of this learning. We enter a new role knowing learning will happen. When it happens to me, I remind myself of my favorite [quote on mistakes](#):

I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes.

Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're Doing Something.  
(Gaiman, 2011)

I fully embrace these processes and have strategies to turn challenges into opportunities for myself and others. However, I currently face a leadership situation that has caught me off guard: The hard learning is happening in a role and context I have established myself in—not in a new leadership position.

### **Unexpected Changes in Familiar Contexts: Reasons for Personal Growth**

I have chaired the English Department at my university for 12 years, and we are lucky to have had new hires in the past 3 years. The newcomers have developed relationships among themselves and created a cohesive team that is ready to support the vision for the department. Until now, I have always been able to turn to two or three people for support in improving our second language teacher education (SLTE) program quality. Now, I have four more. Basically,

half of my department is ready to act as a team and in alignment with new research and current practices in SLTE—a dream come true.

Yes, I am very lucky! Yet, I have been challenged by this new reality. I am unexpectedly confronted with new dynamics in a very familiar context. For such a long time, I have been leading and managing the department in a certain mode that has helped me to bridge the existing gaps in values and practices. The gaps still exist, but I suddenly have the majority of my staff committed to the same vision. I have the foundation for synergy and effective collaboration in the department (Zoglio, 2001) that I have never experienced before.

Two recent events, an orientation for new students and a collaborative project proposal, have unveiled that I am to face a big learning curve that I primarily associate with new leadership positions. Group reflections that followed both events provided me with feedback on my leadership style and collaboration. They showed needs for my growth in the new circumstances. I am called to adjust my leadership style and behaviors and find new paths for leading and managing the department. The new conditions ask for new approaches, which I will need to identify in the upcoming months.

My current leadership challenge reminds me that learning never ceases—even in contexts we are well familiar with. It is important to remain a student of what we are proficient or event expert in, be it leadership or teaching.

## References

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