



## TC Spotlight

# Deryn Verity

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- **Hometown: New York City**
- **Swarthmore College (BA in Linguistics and English Literature)**
- **St Michael's College (MA in TESOL)**
- **University of Delaware (PhD in Linguistics)**
- **Currently director of ESL/EAP programs at Pennsylvania State University**

While holding a tenured professorship at Osaka Jogakuin University, where I taught from 2004 to 2012, I was asked to be an instructor in the MATESOL program at TC Tokyo in September 2007. I continued to come to Tokyo for those weekend classes (mostly teaching Pedagogical Grammar) for several years, stopping in 2011 when the program began to wind down. I left Japan in August 2012, to take a new position at the Pennsylvania State University, where my colleagues include my former dissertation supervisor and well-known sociocultural theorist, Dr. James Lantolf; a long-time friend and influential researcher, Dr. Karen Johnson, whom I first met at a conference in Hong Kong back in 1995 when I was teaching at Osaka University; and Dr. Suresh Canarajah, a plenary speaker at the last JALT conference I was attached to, in October 2012.

Several of our doctoral students did their MA work at TC in New York City, so I still occasionally get updates about folks I first met in Tokyo.

I am the Director of ESL/EAP programs here at Penn State, and also a Teaching Professor in Applied Linguistics. I run a

first-year writing program for matriculated international students (about 1000 students pass through the program each year); teach in the MA TESL program (yes, I still teach a version of the pedagogical grammar course and I still use that huge book, though the third edition is cream & brown, rather than blue.....and I don't insist on the trees as much as I did when we had those leisurely 6-hour Saturday classes.....); coordinate an online Graduate Certificate in TESOL (just closing down this semester after 7 years); and collaborate with various departments, units, colleagues and offices across our campus and our sprawling state university system. I find that I enjoy the administrative side of things more than I thought I would, and though I am officially a faculty member and not an administrator, I do spend a lot of time doing observations, scheduling teachers, writing reports, organizing events, attending meetings and generally trying to keep my program running smoothly.

**What drew you to TC?** I jumped at the chance to teach in the program in Tokyo! TC is not only a pioneer among TESOL programs, but it was also a wonderful chance to contribute to teacher education in my 'second home country' of Japan. I'd taught Pedagogical Grammar to English teachers in Thailand for another cooperative MA TESOL program between St Michael's College in Vermont and ABAC University in Bangkok, and I was eager to do more along those lines. Also, on a very selfish note, I loved traveling around Japan, given how fantastic the trains are there, and the chance to take the shinkansen up to Tokyo several times a semester was a treat for me! I would spend one day of the

weekend teaching and one day sight-seeing and exploring. I saw so many areas of the city that way—while I'd spent many weekends there over the years visiting friends and doing professional events, I really came to enjoy places like the urban wilderness of the gardens at the Institute for Nature Study, the cherry-blossom trail along the Meguro River, the pubs and bookstores of Takadanobaba Station on the Yamanote Line, and the peaceful neighborhoods a stone's throw from, of all places, Roppongi. I also got to indulge my love of Noh theater sometimes.

**What did you learn at TC that ensured you would never be the same again?**

I was an instructor, not a student, at TC, but to quote one of my favorite Rodgers & Hammerstein songs, "by your students you'll be taught"—I have never been the same after teaching GRAMMAR so intensively for so many semesters. It was not something that I particularly considered myself to be an expert in, but years of fielding questions, preparing activities, and really delving into the big blue book (now in its third, and light brown, edition) changed a lot about how I understand language and how I understand people think about language.



### **What is a favorite memory from TC?**

It's kind of hard to choose, since I have so many happy ones! Coming up to Tokyo and spending time with the TC community was really a huge gift that I enjoyed for those years that I was connected to TC. But maybe the warmest memories (in addition to friendly chats with Yumiko & company in the office, and Korean dinners with Bill Snyder after class) was spending those long Saturday classes with so many wonderful students. The day would stretch out, feeling endless at first, and then too short, as we shared ideas and insights and lessons and lore. Hours later, exhausted but full of ideas (and snacks), we'd go our separate ways until next time.



### **What is your favorite thing about your current job? The hardest thing?**

My favorite thing my job now is that I do so many different things! As a professor in Japan, and a lecturer at TC Tokyo, my primary responsibilities were all classroom-based and I spent nearly all my time focusing on preparing good lessons, responding to student work, helping students understand and cope with the material in our 900+-page textbook, etc. But now I get to do different things every day. I still teach, and I still put a lot of time into student-oriented lessons & planning, etc. But I also go to meetings with people from all over the state (PSU has more than 20 campuses), write reports, give workshops to various audiences, organize and lead professional development events for language teachers, on topics ranging from using drama to teaching legal terminology, collaborate with colleagues on curricular and programmatic innovation, serve on committees that help undergraduate education in fields well outside my own, occasionally head down to the Medical School 100 miles away to do workshops, and generally draw upon my decades of experience in many ways, some of them unpredictable.

The hardest thing is working in such a large university context; even though the individuals that I know personally are great, and my students are great, it can be difficult to escape the sense of working in a kind of 'factory' of knowledge! There are thousands and thousands of people on this campus!

### **Share a recent classroom episode.**

One of the classes I teach regularly is a Tutoring Internship class for our MA TESL students. It is usually taken in the first year, a kind of pre-practicum experience; the MA students are assigned several individual tutees from our first-year writing program and they learn to support their tutees in all the dimensions of academic writing in the L2. In the first class I often ask the MA students ‘what kind of teacher do you want to be?’ and I encourage them to use an analogy or a metaphor to describe their thoughts. A few years ago, one young woman said that she wanted to be a “lighthouse”—someone who is there to illuminate the rocks and shoals of learning, and to be a steady source of comfort and knowledge to her students. After graduating from our MA program, she found a job in New York City. One day last summer I found in my mailbox a postcard from a tiny beach town out on Long Island, with a picture of a lighthouse on it: she’d been out there at the beach, and she wondered if I remembered what she’d said in class that day. I was happy to report to her that I have never forgotten her words!

**What is the secret to your success?** I’ll take a stab at answering this question but not because I think I’ve been so ‘successful’—at least not in the conventional terms of academia. If I have succeeded, it was due primarily to good luck and being in the right place at the right time, but also because I’ve defined success mostly on my own terms: I found—early on—that I loved teaching, so I chose a career where teaching is central, and I chose a field (TESOL) which takes pedagogy seriously. I also learned, kind of to my surprise, that I loved working in other countries, so I grabbed that option whenever it came along. I pursued higher degrees because I enjoyed the challenges and security of being part of a program where I could live a dual existence as a teacher (earning my keep) and a student (learning and thinking). And though I could never have articulated it this way, I became more and more someone who has said ‘yes’ to doors that beckoned me through them. I would say that in my soul I am a relatively cautious person, but I’ve gained most when I’ve taken (modest) risks!



# **TCCUJAA**