



This reflection is adapted from the introduction to Dr Rebekah Clarkson's keynote '*One small thing: A cause for optimism*' at the AALL Symposium on 7th December 2022. It is drawn from her own experience, observations in her role as current AALL President (2021-2023) and from the literature.

WHO ARE WE?

We are learning advisers.

We are also learning designers, lecturers, program developers, coaches, mentors and peer-to-peer coordinators.

We are language specialists, TESOL specialists, maths specialists, teaching specialists and researchers.

We work in central teams, within faculties, in libraries and writing centres. Our work is multi-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary, inter-disciplinary: we develop online resources, facilitate workshops, give lectures, and develop and teach literacies embedded in curricula. We initiate and develop peer support programs across a range of platforms, working creatively and collaboratively with student leaders.

We work directly with students in 1:1 advising and in small and large groups, and not at all.

Our advising work fuels and informs our broader teaching work and our deep understanding of student experience. Students hold our support in high regard and form trust-based relationships with us. These students are undergraduate, postgraduate, international, EAL, first-in-family, First Nations and just finished high school. They are neurodiverse, neurotypical and manage a multitude of personal challenges that we are often aware of and seek to support within the parameters of our role.

Our work intersects and dovetails with that of counsellors, access and inclusion professionals, career advisers, international student support officers.

Our work impacts, and is impacted by, issues of social justice, globalization, colonialism and neoliberalism.

We are on fixed term contracts and in continuing professional roles. We are tenured academics and on multiple years-long casual contracts that have just cut out – again. We work in hospitality and retail on the weekends and through the summer, to pay the bills.

Our roles have been re-classified and re-titled, our teams re-structured.

We have PhDs in physics, education, pure mathematics, philosophy, history, creative writing, English, anthropology and more. We have master's degrees in teaching and multiple postgraduate qualifications in linguistics and TESOL.



We are monolingual, bilingual, multilingual.

We have imposter syndrome; we do not have imposter syndrome.

We marvel at how we got here; we are mystified as to how we got here; we know exactly how we got here.

We are managers, coordinators, directors: we clean, wrangle and analyse data; we ask and answer big questions about value and impact.

We monitor a [Studiosity](#) account and manage the [PASS](#) program.

Some of us were instrumental in establishing [ICAALD](#). Some of us have not heard of [ICAALD](#).

We ask questions like:

- How do I bring my professional and academic background to my academic language and learning role?
- How do I identify key literacies required by students to succeed in this course and embed these with sustainability and impact?
- How do I capture and report on the complex nuanced work my team does in the margins of what is being formally evaluated? All the work ‘that goes without saying’?
- How do I negotiate relationships with faculty staff when discussing assessment tasks in their courses?
- What’s the most effective way to structure a 1:1 student advising appointment for *this particular student*?

We are ‘third space’ professionals – we operate within the blurred boundaries of academic, professional and administrative spaces; we operate in transitional spaces between students’ worlds inside and outside the institution.

We have hybrid-professional identities, defined by ambiguity and positional liminality: we are frustrated by this; we are distressed by this; we are comfortable with this; we are energized by this.

We are third space-occupying subversive shapeshifters. Our work is defined by flexibility and adaptability; we were pivoting before the pandemic crystallized the concept and destroyed that word forever.

- Dr Rebekah Clarkson, University of South Australia, December 2022

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