Shape the Shoes to Fit the Feet
by Ke Xu

Reflections of a Former Mainstream Teacher
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This issue, my first as editor of Essential Teacher, marks the beginning of an exhilarating experience for me. My connection with ET began last year, when I submitted a manuscript and it was rejected. But I didn’t let that discourage me. In fact, the section editor did me a favor by supplying me with a fine critique of my ideas and writing. What I did next was develop the manuscript into a book proposal, and then I applied to become editor of ET. I am proud to join this exceptional team.

This is the place for classroom teachers to publish their research on practice. My example shows that writing for publication involves risk, but it is one I hope you will take. There is no question that the review process has helped me to strengthen my writing each time I’ve gone through it. The ET editors spend a great deal of time on every manuscript they receive. They can help you refine your ideas, as they have helped me. The field needs to hear the stories of classroom teachers. Write up your ideas and send them to us.

At the TESOL convention in Tampa, I met for the first time with the ET team. It is no exaggeration to say that these TESOL professionals are motivated and excited about working on the organization’s primary publication. As interim editor, Christine Meloni has to be thanked for doing such a wonderful job under unfortunate circumstances. Christine has announced that she will not continue as Home and Other Pages editor after this year. Likewise, Phil Quirke, the founding editor of Out of the Box, and Shannon Sauro, the Compleat Links editor, will vacate their positions at the end of this volume year. We are very sorry to see them leave, but anticipate attracting new talents to the magazine to replace them. Please consider applying to join the ET team (see p. 18).

- **Communities of Practice:** Judie Haynes (Circle Time) describes how introducing students to nonfiction writing early can greatly improve their prose. Jim Hughes (Home Room) puts himself in learners’ shoes by trying to learn some Hindi and Filipino. Debbie Zacarian (The Road Taken) addresses the issue of high-stakes testing in public education. Ke Xu (Multilingual Momentum)
gives teachers practical advice on helping foreign students adjust to life in the United States. Andy Curtis (In-Service) outlines a professional development approach for busy teachers. Dorothy Zemach (From A to Z) asks you to consider your policy on the use of English in the classroom.

• Out of the Box: Kimberly Wyman explains what moving from the mainstream classroom into ESL has meant to her. Leona Mason and her colleagues organized a career fair to open up possibilities for immigrant children. Bill Zimmerman's paper memory quilts help students become more fluent speakers and writers. Problems that teachers may face when moving to unfamiliar cultures are addressed by Natalie Hess through film and reaction journals.

• Portal: Charles Hall and Debra Lee show teachers how to create corpora to address particular needs. Wayne Rimmer follows up on this theme with a focus on corpora for testing purposes. Kathy Brenner shares her experience of writing a course book for the first time. Suzanne Blum Malley finds herself falling behind her students technologically and reenters the classroom to upgrade her skills.

• Home and Other Pages: Susan Finn Miller addresses the need for literacy programs for families. A book about a modern woman traveling the world and immersing herself in various cultures is reviewed by Robin Alexander. Douglas Forster introduces an online language learning course. Dawn Bikowski explores some underused features of Microsoft Word. Stephanie Sareeram gives teachers ideas on using the feature film Good Night and Good Luck in lessons.

• Compleat Links: (in the Essential Teacher section of http://www.tesol.org/): David Johnson tells what the No Child Left Behind Act means for many English learners in Philadelphia. Hillary Gardner sketches her experiences with the power of art in the classroom. Mary Libby and Geoff McKonly float a novel idea for content-based language instruction. Which variety of English should teachers use in EFL contexts? Alan Rosen provides suggestions. And Richard Firsten (Grammatically Speaking) answers questions about changes in the use of ordinal and cardinal numbers, and poses another Brain Teaser.
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The Elements of International English Style
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This easy-to-use handbook is an essential resource for anyone who needs to write English correspondence and other documents for an international business audience. In an engaging, accessible style, it integrates the theory and controversies of intercultural communication with the practical skills of writing and editing English for those who read it as a second language.

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Planning and Teaching Creatively within a Required Curriculum for School-Age Learners
Edited by Penny McKay

The contributors to this volume developed innovative ways of working within the limits of a required curriculum for young learners. In each case, a key feature was collaboration among players in the school context — learners, teachers, administrators, and researchers. The resulting innovations supported learners in tackling content, including literature, human rights, history, and environmental issues. Each chapter is sure to inspire educators who want to provide rich learning experiences for young students.

Order online at www.tesol.org
The biggest challenge when teaching writing to new learners of English is that many of them develop text in their native language and then try to translate it into English. This translated writing is full of inaccurate verb tenses and unintelligible sentences. There are so many errors that editing becomes problematic for teachers. I feel strongly that it is better to help students avoid writing in English through the filter of their native language. In my experience, the problem is particularly evident when students in grades three through six have developed writing skills in a first language that is very different from English.

For this reason, I don’t have my students free write. (In free writing, students write without stopping and without worrying about correctness.) Why teach them to write incomprehensively? Nor do I encourage beginners to write in a journal, as this writing is also unstructured. One classroom teacher told me that she had students write in a journal every night at home. I could only imagine the results of that with English language learners. Their text would range from incoherent writing to work that has been overseen and overcorrected by parents. The writing would definitely be product oriented.

What problems do students face when learning to write in English? First, their vocabulary is restricted, and they limit themselves to words they know how to spell. As a result, they repeat the same words and phrases again and again. Their sentence structure is generally chaotic and the grammar obscure. Here is a text written by a fifth-grade newcomer in her mainstream classroom in response to the prompt “If you were an animal, what animal would you like to be and why?”

I like be eagle becas eagle birds king and he fly very up. They scard. When they baby, they take off they feather and they squek they claw. (Yimin, September 2003)
How can you avoid the garbled writing that Yimin produced? I am convinced that English language learners write better if they begin with nonfiction reading and writing. Graphic organizers such as story maps, T-charts, and Venn diagrams help scaffold writing and provide students with language chunks that can be used in their text. If topics are developed orally, nonfiction vocabulary expanded and charted, and correct sentence structure modeled, student writing will improve dramatically.

One way to achieve this is to teach nonfiction writing during a writing workshop and to modify the steps in the writing process for beginning-level English language learners. The topics used during this lesson should be taken from the students’ subject-area content. I recommend the following steps:

**Prewriting:** You will need to spend a lot of time in this stage with new learners of English.

- As a follow-up to nonfiction reading, brainstorm and chart facts about the topic in sentence form. Have the students read the facts from your chart orally. Strengthen the link between oral and written language.
- Keep a running list of content vocabulary. Review and practice the vocabulary every day. Speak and write facts in full sentences.

- Use graphic organizers to help students arrange ideas. English learners will usually find it difficult to go from phrases to comprehensible sentences, so complete the organizer with sentences, not phrases. Students may not value this strategy if they have not used organizers to write in their native language, so you will need to insist on their using it.

**Writing:** Have students practice writing from a story map, Venn diagram, or other type of graphic organizer. Provide them with an organizer that you have written together on the nonfiction topic. This organizer gives beginning writers the language and structure that they need. Show clearly what should be covered in the writing and how it should be organized.

**Editing:** Don’t expect students who are not fluent in English to edit their own work. They will not usually find their own mistakes. Take a hands-on approach: hold regular conferences to discuss their works-in-progress. If you have students peer-edit, remember that English learners may be reluctant to share their work with native speakers. You may want to group beginning-level students with more fluent native speakers. Give pairs a specific item to check (for example, “Check the -s at the end of a verb if you are talking about one other person.”). You may need to teach a minilesson about the item you want edited.

**Revising:** English language learners will not remember what to revise unless you mark changes clearly on their papers. Instead of writing “Add more information here,” write more specifically “Tell what eagles eat here.” If you involve students in the editing process, the revisions will be more meaningful to them.

**Publishing:** This is an important step. Help students develop a sense of audience by encouraging them to share their writing with classmates and family. Display work in the classroom and hallway, or make classroom books.

I see beginning-level students take giant steps when nonfiction writing is introduced in writing workshops and the process is modified as shown above. Weeks later, Yimin wrote this piece in her ESL classroom:

**Eagle**

- are carnivores.
- live in forest.
- eat small mammal, fish, and snakes.
- use eyes to see prey.
- use eyes to see prey.
- catch food with sharp talons.
- are diurnal because they hunt in the day.

Yimin’s nonfiction writing is comprehensible. She has correctly used the unit vocabulary, errors in grammar are easily identified and rectified, and the sentence structure is accurate. She is now ready to try other types of writing.
It was fall 1997. The father was late from work, the toddler was ill, and the mother didn’t want her eight- and nine-year-old daughters, Chitra and Shanata, walking in the neighborhood by themselves. Their teachers, Ms. Miles and I, escorted them home. As we walked, they taught us how to count to ten in Hindi.

They couldn’t help but laugh as we misspoke. “Good, but say it like this,” they said repeatedly. “You are patient teachers,” Ms. Miles responded as we tried to get the numbers straight and associate their sounds with English words. Their mother invited us in and served tea, giving us the opportunity for an impromptu home visit. To everyone’s glee, we demonstrated our Hindi, risking appearing foolish.

Speaking their language was one way for Ms. Miles and me to show respect for the family’s culture. Our poor Hindi also strengthened the mother’s confidence in her less-than-perfect English, increasing the likelihood that she would participate in school activities. Indeed, when our classes celebrated Diwali, the festival of lights, the parents’ assistance helped bring Indian culture, including food, into the curriculum.

For a cultural festival the following spring, my class decided to sing a Filipino folk song. Filipinos were one of the school’s most rapidly growing ethnic groups. Since in the winter we had performed a poem in Spanish, it seemed appropriate to sing in Filipino, though I hadn’t any idea how to speak or even decode the language.

Vangeline said that her grandfather might help. He met with me one day after school, bringing with him a cassette of taped songs. He had kindly written out the lyrics of “Leron, Leron Sinta,” but he lacked the English proficiency to translate them. I took the opportunity to ask him about Filipino culture.

“Filipino children honor the elders,” he said.

“What an excellent idea!” I exclaimed.

Later my class composed a skit in which a boy and a girl visit their godparents during a holiday to pay respects before they receive gifts.
was pleased that Emerlyn, a shy Filipino girl who was in speech therapy and suffered panic attacks if she were called upon, wished to perform.

Since my three Filipino students understood spoken Filipino much better than they read the language, I asked a bilingual program assistant to translate the lyrics. The song, she said, was about the capacity of Filipinos to laugh at and triumph over life’s misfortunes. I asked her to teach me how to decode the lyrics. She soon noticed that I was not quick at language learning. “I think you need five to seven years,” she said, teasing me. My students, I realized, would have to read the words, too. She suggested that she say them slowly and that I write them phonetically and with stress marks. When I completed the lyrics, I had a text the children and I could read.

We rehearsed over several days until the students became irritated. “We know it already!” they declared. I agreed, especially because we would have to read the words, too. She suggested that she say them slowly and that I write them phonetically and with stress marks. When I completed the lyrics, I had a text the children and I could read.

Next a child recited the song’s lyrics in English so the large number of people who did not speak Filipino would have some idea what we were singing. I signaled my principal, and he pressed play. As the music began, my students and I looked at each other with perplexity. Rushing to the recorder, I pressed stop.

“Weren’t you ready?” the principal asked.

“That’s not the song!” I had preset it because it was in the middle of the tape. “It must be in backwards,” I said as I ejected the cassette, turned it over, and placed it back in. When I pressed play, the lyrics might just as well have been in Hindi.

The audience and my performers were becoming restless. Racing up the center steps to the stage, I gathered my class together. “The tape is not behaving,” I said.

“We can’t sing without music!” cried Bryant.

“We don’t have to sing. Just read the Filipino words with me.”

Turning to the audience, I explained the mishap, then sat on the steps in front of the stage. Enunciating as clearly as I could, I read the lyrics into the microphone, the children reading behind me—or, at least, I hoped so. As the audience applauded and the students left the stage, I heard Rosa, who did not speak Filipino, say to a classmate, “I was so embarrassed!”

I took the children outside and praised them for their courage. “Do you remember, Chitra, when Ms. Miles and I counted in Hindi?”

“It was funny.”

“Yes, but it was also brave. That’s what learning requires. Tonight you risked being Filipino. You spoke the language, and you overcame bad luck, a Filipino strength.” Addressing Vangeline, Emerlyn, and Roneil, I asked them how they felt.

“Happy,” said Vangeline with Emerlyn nodding in agreement.

“I feel good for my family,” said Roneil.

After the program, parents assured me that nearly all the children appeared to speak the words. “Did you understand our Filipino?” I asked the Filipino adults.

“Mostly,” said Emerlyn’s father.

Roneil’s mother spoke up: “I have not heard before tonight students and you, teacher, who do not know our language, speak Filipino. You make us proud.”

“Interesting dialect,” Vangeline’s grandfather added, smiling.

ek, do, teen, char ...
I met Juan at an end-of-year party that my district’s teachers of high school English language learners hosted for their students. It was held in one of the classrooms, after school. The party was filled with many students and teachers—so many, in fact, that they spilled out into the hallway. While Caribbean music played in the background, students and teachers danced, and enjoyed the music and food that the teachers had brought. During the festivities, one of the teachers introduced me to Juan.

“I have a question for you, director,” Juan said to me. “Why do you make me take the MCAS [Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System] test when I don’t speak enough English to take a test in English?”

The tests are written entirely in English. Juan, understandably, wanted to know why he had to take and pass an exam in a language in which he was not yet proficient. And he thought I was the appropriate person to ask about it.

Should students like Juan be required to pass a standardized test in English to earn a high school diploma? In January 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (n.d.), the MCAS was implemented in accordance with the Education Reform law of 1993. The law required that all students, including English language learners, be tested annually and that the results be used to examine individual, school, and district performance. The MCAS was also implemented in response to the NCLB Act, which required public schools to assess the performance of
its students in core subject matters (i.e., English, math, social studies, and science) and that all tenth-grade students pass the MCAS as a “condition of eligibility for earning a high school diploma” (Massachusetts Department of Education n.d.).

Juan's future, and that of his classmates, depends on their performance on the MCAS tests. The case of An, a classmate of Juan's, illustrates some of the complexities of the MCAS and other public-school statewide assessment initiatives as part of the eligibility requirement for a high school diploma. One year ago, An moved from Vietnam to the United States. She could not speak English and required a translator to meaningfully understand all of her instructional program. Her motivation to learn and do well in school was quite strong. She frequently stayed after school for additional help and wasn't afraid to ask questions and seek information to make meaning of her instructional program. An had been supported during her transition into the new environment and was comfortable in it.

A year after An arrived, she was required to take the MCAS. Her translator was not allowed to assist her. The only accommodation that she and other public school English language learners are allowed is the use of a state-approved bilingual dictionary of word-to-word translations without definitions.

Faced with the MCAS tests, An broke down in tears. She fled the exam site and sought out her tutor. Speaking Vietnamese, she sobbed uncontrollably about how badly she felt about not being able to take the test. During the ensuing weeks, her attitude toward learning dramatically shifted from one of open-minded risk taker to that of timid, tentative learner.

The volume of assessments that are required of English language learners and other students in U.S. public schools has grown significantly. While the purpose of the testing is to provide students and their families, schools, and districts with a measure of how students are performing, it has had a powerfully negative impact on how some students perceive themselves as learners. Sadly, students such as An and Juan have found taking the tests untenable. Understandably, they have not yet developed the skills in English to test their performance in subject matter in English and, therefore, believe the test to be unreasonable.

An's reaction to the testing situation was not unusual. Many students have been reduced to tears when they take the MCAS. And while English language learners are not required to take the English language arts and reading portions of the test during their first year of enrollment in U.S. schools, some students and families understandably do not wish to be treated differently from their peers. These students prefer taking the test, knowing that they cannot pass it, rather than be excused.

These complexities speak to the impact of statewide testing on public school English language learners. While the purpose of testing may be important and, indeed, no child should be left behind, Juan's question—“Why do you make me take the MCAS test when I don't speak enough English to take a test in English?”—resonates loudly.

**Some students have not yet developed the skills in English to test their performance in subject matter and, therefore, believe the test to be unreasonable.**

Reference
Reshaping feet, or students, doesn’t work. How can you find “shoes” of the right size for your students? What can you do if the shoes you give them don’t fit? How do you develop and continually refresh the ESL curriculum to best serve the needs of new immigrant students? These are issues I have been trying to address in my work in New York City, which has approximately three million foreign-born immigrants (the second largest immigrant population in the United States).

I teach two adult ESL classes in the Borough of Manhattan Community College, one at the high-beginning level and one at the low-intermediate level. To find out what the students need, I survey them, chat with them during coffee breaks and after class, watch ethnic news channels, read ethnic newspapers, visit the neighborhoods of new immigrants, and read Web sites that address immigrant issues. All of this information feeds into my curriculum, which is customized to develop students’ survival skills, life skills, and job skills.

Each student’s first priority is to learn how to survive. To this end, the students in my lower level class engage in a group exploration of New York City’s subway, the world’s largest and perhaps most complicated subway system. (In 1998, for example, a new Chinese immigrant got lost in New York’s subway and spent a whole week there until the transit police found him.) For this activity, I divide the class into groups of five or six. Each group picks a destination in another borough, finds the shortest route on the map, and chooses the best train to take. When the groups come back, they report on all the station names along the route, the transfer trains available at each station, and the names of the landmark buildings located on the ground level at certain stations. After the project, the students in one class said they no longer feared taking the subway alone.

Although most ESL teachers understand the importance of assisting new immigrant students in adapting to their new lives, teachers often focus more on how to change students without considering the need to change themselves: “This is what we teach and how we teach in the United States (or another country). You just have to follow along.” This is like saying, “Here is a pair of shoes for you. If they don’t fit, reshape your feet to make them fit.”

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In addition, students listen to audiotapes, watch videos, and perform role plays. They learn how to make 911 calls to report a fire, robbery, or medical emergency, and how to ask for help from a police officer, a neighbor, or a fellow pedestrian. I also list some basic police commands that they need to understand, such as “Freeze!,” “Don’t move!,” or “Everybody on the floor!” In 1998, a new immigrant was shot to death by a New York City police officer because he didn’t understand the police command “Freeze!” and reached into his pocket—probably for his passport. In contrast, one night last year, Sandy, a Chinese student in my lower level class, discovered someone trying to rob her uncle’s restaurant. With the English she learned in the class, she made a 911 call that probably saved her uncle’s life.

Students also work in pairs to learn how to answer the phone at home; how to take a message; how to call someone’s home and leave a message on an answering machine; how to call a doctor’s office to make or cancel an appointment; and how to call a business to ask for store hours, complain about poor service, or complain about being overcharged. One day, Wilmic, a Haitian student, brought a phone bill to me and asked me to help him resolve a dispute with the phone company. I decided to make this situation part of my lesson. After Wilmic told the class what the dispute was about, students discussed in groups what they would say to the phone company and predicted the excuses company representatives might give. Next, I called the company and had the students listen to me talk to the representative. The students then role-played the phone call in pairs. They particularly enjoyed bargaining with each other.

I also give working students time in my class to share with their classmates the experiences they have on their jobs, both successful and unsuccessful. They bring questions that came up at work and discuss possible solutions with their classmates. If we can’t come up with solutions in class, I recommend books to read, places to call, or Web sites to visit. I also encourage those students working in the same profession or similar ones to keep in touch so that they can help each other when necessary. Sometimes I invite former students who are now successful in their careers to talk to the class.

My experience in teaching new immigrant students has taught me that ESL teachers need to shape and continually reshape the curriculum to best serve these students’ needs. The Chinese have a saying to ridicule those who sacrifice the more important to accommodate the less important: 削足适履—literally, trim off the toes to fit into the shoes. I would argue instead, if the shoes don’t fit, pick another pair. Better to change the shoe than pinch the foot.

If the shoes don’t fit, pick another pair. Better to change the shoe than pinch the foot.
In-Service

Not Looking in the Mirror, but Stepping Back to Move Forward
by Andy Curtis

Perhaps the commonest metaphor for thinking about what teachers do in professional development is the mirror, as they are often encouraged (and sometimes required—which does not work as well) to become more reflective practitioners. However, because of the nature of light and the way photons work, what you see when you look in a mirror is a reversed or “backward” image. Therefore, rather than recommending that you look closely at yourself in the mirror, I propose stepping back from works of art.

Not everybody gets to go to art galleries and museums, and I must confess that, when I go, I often do not fully understand the art. Then why do I go? I go not so much to watch the art as to watch other people watching the art. In my experience, people coming face to face with a work of art for the first time initially get as close as they can to the painting or sculpture, for example. After staring up close for a while, they move back, one step at a time, not taking their eyes off the piece. Such focused attention is the result of viewers trying to make sense of what they are seeing, to fully understand it by assigning to it their own personal meaning and interpretation, based on a lifetime of experience.

Can this approach be applied to teaching? Or is teaching more of a science than an art? I have asked this question to many teachers in many countries over the past ten years, and the response is always fascinating. Most teachers generally go for the artistic end of the continuum, with fewer, braver souls raising their hands at the scientific end. The answer is, of course, that what you do can be both art and science, depending on how you do it.

My own view on the question relates to some experiences in previous careers. My first career was in clinical biochemistry, working at hospitals in England. One of our main roles as research scientists was to develop formulae that accurately predicted how different biological compounds would react under certain specific conditions. I have often thought of these scientific rules as being analogous to grammatical rules in a language, as the environmental context decides on how the rule is represented, applied, and interpreted.
Later, in another career, as a high school teacher of a subject then known in England as Craft, Design, Technology, I noticed that what often made art was to some extent the opposite of what made science. If you start out to create something knowing exactly what it will be at the end of the process, then you may create a thing of beauty, but it may not be art. For it to be art, a degree of unpredictability may be necessary—moments of creative chaos, as many teachers have experienced in English language lessons at one time or another.

I believe that every successful lesson is carefully crafted, bringing together elements of science to create a work of art. But what has this to do with professional development? The viewer standing in front of a painting or sculpture is trying to do what you as a teacher are trying to do when engaged in professional development. Both of you are trying to find ways to make sense of a beautiful, complex creation, a one-of-a-kind occurrence, never to be repeated in exactly the same way again, at any time, in any place. You call these events lessons and move through so many of them in a day, week, month, and year that you may not stop to think of them as works of art or things of beauty.

For you as a busy teacher, the apparently simple idea of stepping back to get a better look may be appealing, as it will not add excessively to your already-too-full schedules and might actually help you manage your work so you have time for other things, like family and friends. Here are some questions that may help you step back and get a better look at the works of art you create in the classroom:

- Do you see anything now in your classroom, or in your lessons, that was not there before?
- Is there anything you cannot see in your classroom, or in your lessons, that used to be there but is not there anymore?
- As you look at your classroom and your lessons, do you see more moments of creative chaos than before? If so, do these moments lead to the creation of works of art? If not, why not?

Or do you see more moments of well-defined and clearly structured interaction? Such moments can also be part of the creative process and can also lead to the creation of works of art. Do they do so in your classrooms? If so, how? If not, why not?

Asking yourself questions like these can help you engage in a process of positive professional growth, development, and change. The next step, which I'll discuss in my September column, is to learn how to generate answers to the questions.
The arguments against letting students use their native language in class are many. It wastes time. It distracts other students. It excludes students who do not understand that language. It increases a teacher's paranoia (Are they talking about you?). It decreases the opportunities for those students to practice speaking and listening to English. Some teachers are more concerned about these dangers than others. I taught in a program once where one of the teachers patrolled the areas outside the classrooms during the breaks between classes and actually shot students speaking their native languages with a water pistol. Attacking students was obviously going too far, but I have developed my own methods for keeping students in English. For example, sometimes I put one mark on the chalkboard each time someone spoke a native language, and when the class earned more than ten marks, I gave the entire class extra homework. That way, the students policed each other. Or I have charged students a small fee each time they spoke a language other than English, and at the end of the term we used the money to finance a class party.

Even in my earlier days, I recognized the value of sometimes using the native language to help teach English. It is a far more efficient use of class time to let a low-level student ask, “How do you say bengoshi in English?” than to try to explain or mime lawyer. However, I did feel that the use of one’s native language should be limited, at best, and, of course, should be used only for asking about English.

My feelings changed when I taught for a year at a language center in Morocco. The center offered its foreign teachers free Arabic lessons, so I enrolled in a beginning-level class. The teacher, who spoke fluent French and reasonable English, insisted that only Arabic be used in class. Unfortunately, she wasn’t a very good teacher, and after about
three lessons, everyone was lost. Since we didn't know how to ask questions in Arabic, we couldn't ask for help or even explain what our difficulties were. However, that was not the most frustrating aspect of the class for me.

I sat next to a friendly Canadian man. We shared English, French, and the same sense of humor; and while we were both sincere language learners, a lot of things in class struck us as funny, and we would sometimes whisper remarks to each other or pass notes. Our behavior made the teacher furious. She reported us to the director as “bad students” because we would not speak only Arabic. We both dropped the class, followed soon by the rest of the students.

While I didn't learn Arabic, I did learn some other reasons to speak one's native language in class: to make friends and to have a good time. I learn better when I'm enjoying myself, and I'm sure I'm not alone in this. After my year in Morocco, I eased up remarkably on my former English-only policy, to the point where I once allowed an advanced-level academic writing class with only Thai students to speak in Thai whenever they felt they needed to as long as they were on task. I felt at first as if I were breaking some sort of rule, and worried that the students might tell others and that I would get in trouble. One thing I didn't worry about was keeping students on task, because I could easily tell when they had switched from discussing writing to just chatting even though I don't speak a word of Thai. The students made progress in both their English and their writing, and they enjoyed the class and found it useful.

All that is not to say that things can't get out of hand. There have been times when, had someone handed me a water pistol, I might not have been able to promise that some students wouldn't get wet. So the next to last thing I would like to share is my favorite way to keep a class in English when necessary. I once taught in a two-week intensive immersion program for incoming workers at Sumitomo Electric Industries in Japan. Though the students generally had quite low levels of English, they were supposed to stay entirely in English for the whole two weeks, including break times, meal times, and rest times. The method for enforcing this was to give each student ten large safety pins, called boo-boo pins, which they kept with them at all times. If a student spoke Japanese, a trainer or any other student could take the offender's pin and add it to his or her own collection. In the two weeks, a student rarely lost more than four or five pins. It was an amazing technique, and while I can't explain exactly why it worked so well, I've had similar success with it in the United States using paper clips (having different colors for each student is a nice touch).

In concluding, I'll ask you to consider your policy on English in the classroom. Whether you've been teaching three months or thirty years, you doubtless have one, even if you have never articulated it. Ask yourself, too, what beliefs underlie your policy. Please don't go so far as to carry a loaded (water) gun, but do consider whether your policy is working for both you and your students or whether you'd like to either loosen or tighten the reins.
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Out of the box

Reflections of a Former Mainstream Teacher
by Kimberly A. Wyman

After nine years as a mainstream classroom teacher, my transition three years ago to the ESL classroom has challenged my perspective on education and shaken my sense of what good teaching practice is. I only wish I had had the knowledge then that I do now. I know now that the English language learners in the mainstream classes I taught were set up to fail—not on purpose, of course, but through lack of knowledge and education about how students learn English.

As I recall the lessons learned from the second language students I taught, one exceptional student, named Maximiliano, stands out. Was he ready to come back to school after vacation? “Yes, because I missed study,” Maximiliano wrote in his dialogue journal the first day back of the New Year. Maximiliano arrived from Mexico at the beginning of the school year with limited English but will exit fourth grade with proficiency levels beyond his teacher’s expectations. All students come to school with the potential to learn, and if there are any limits, it is usually the adults who set them.

Build the Background

“I help my dad read the newspaper so he can find work,” Maximiliano wrote in his young author story, titled “A Bilingual Student.” I convinced him that he was very talented to be able to speak, read, and write in more than one language—a conviction I hold strongly, being monolingual myself.

“Tell your story,” I said.

“I am able to help my mom translate at the doctor’s office and read the information on bills so my parents can pay them.” Being the only child at home who could...
translate, he liked the opportunity to help. It was one of his many roles within the family. In Hispanic families, “the primary goal of the family is to succeed as a unit. Children were seen to contribute to these goals when they functioned well within the system as a whole, neither disrupting its balance nor causing the family to devote its energy to nonessential concerns” (Valdés, 1996, 117).

In the mainstream classroom, I made too many assumptions about the background knowledge of English language learners. I didn’t do enough background building before I let them work independently and then wondered why they did not succeed. In contrast, I always encourage Maximiliano to share information about his family, as doing so helps make connections from text to background knowledge. As Grabe (1991) points out, the reader and text interact as the reader uses prior background knowledge and knowledge from the text to derive meaning. When Maximiliano speaks and writes about his family, I can relate classroom texts and experiences to what he knows and, with that context, continue to build meaning.

Seize the Moment
Maximiliano spoke of his brother wanting to go to school and help animals. I took advantage of the moment to discuss what a veterinarian was and to teach the term college. I have learned that impromptu teaching is valuable in continuing to make connections and open pathways to learning.

I asked Maximiliano to give me an example of what being a bilingual student is like. He wrote, “Being a bilingual student is like I’m flying.”

I was astonished. I couldn’t believe a student in his first year of learning a language had just used a simile. I asked him to elaborate and again was surprised by his answer. “Both of them are relaxing,” he told me. “I enjoy flying because I look at the sky and like go up, up and up very fast. I like being a bilingual student so I can help other people. That makes me feel happy.”

Equalize the Opportunities
I know from experience that opportunity is everything. I was excited to hear Maximiliano’s perspective on his future. “I want to study so that I can go to college and be a veterinarian. If no veterinarian than maybe I can create games in Spanish and English. I can be a good translator. I can also go around the world and be a spy. That would be so cool!”

My mistake in the mainstream classroom was thinking that all my students knew how to take advantage of opportunities. I gave them out equally but failed to realize that these opportunities were only truly equal for students with parents who could help at home.

An example is when a fifth-grade student, Bryan, won a scholarship to a space camp for his essay in the wake of the loss of the U.S. space shuttle Columbia on the theme Do you feel that space exploration is worth the risk? As a mainstream classroom teacher, I would have handed out the contest and rules (all in English) and told the students to talk with their parents and decide if they were interested in submitting an essay. If they intended to submit an essay, they should turn it in to me on the date specified.

Equal opportunity, right? Not so, as I was assuming that all the students had the same resources available outside class. My new awareness of the needs of English language learners in schools led me to offer to help those students. Bryan came forward, and we spent two to three weeks researching and writing his winning essay during recess and any other spare time we could find. Only with guidance and support was the opportunity made equal.

Promote Self-Confidence
Students gain self-confidence through positive experiences using the language they are acquiring. I saw the excitement in Maximiliano’s eyes when he told me that he had joined wrestling and the 4-H Club, an organization that provides opportunities for youth to learn responsibility and leadership skills through working with animals and doing projects.

Wrestling makes him a little nervous. He is raising and showing pigs this year for 4-H. He sees the fun, and I see the opportunity for language in context within a social and academic situation. I know he will be successful because of his personality. His will to learn and succeed is not something you can teach.

Krashen (1988) claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. When I work with Maximiliano, I intermittently have other students join in specifically so they can interact with a positive role model who is willing to try anything. This, I feel, supports learning by keeping the affective filter low for hesitant learners and those that lack the self-confidence needed to take a risk.

The Value of Time and Scaffolding
Being new to ESL, I asked Maximiliano, “How did you learn so much English?”

He replied, “When I went to school in Mexico from my teachers.” I inquired further. “We had one hour of English each day.” Since research has shown that it takes two to three years to acquire proficiency in social language and five to seven years to learn the academic language of schools (Cummins 2003), Maximiliano’s abilities amaze me.
When I was in the mainstream classroom, I was apt to jump to the early conclusion that the English language learners in my class might have learning disabilities. I now know better. What is more likely is that they simply need time to acquire the language and strategies that support them while they do so.

Now, as an ESL educator, I have opportunities to push into other mainstream classrooms to see teaching strategies that work for all students, including English language learners. For example, a colleague, Barbara Sinclair, uses math dictionaries with concrete examples and graphic organizers in writing as well as reading. Rather than seeing graphic organizers as merely a way to have students show their understanding, I’ve learned how valuable these organizers can be as tools and planners.

In another class I observed, Kimberly Sanford, a special education teacher at the high school level, showed students how to create lists of questions whenever they came upon a roadblock during note-taking. These questions could then be answered by a peer or teacher in a small group.

I have also memorized what a colleague, Nicole Scheuerman, says about differentiation: it is not only important for English language learners but is simply best teaching practice for all students. Each child enters my classroom at a different level of learning and language acquisition, and my teaching has benefited from the realization that one concept can be taught in multiple ways. I know that I cannot be an expert in every aspect of education, so I utilize others’ expertise to maximize my students’ learning.

**Gifts Given and Received**

Besides the lessons I’ve learned about language learning, I’ve also learned a lot from Maximiliano about his culture in a short time. Teaching English language learners has changed my perspective on education and made me a better teacher, and I thank the teachers and students around me for this gift.

“I asked Maximiliano to give me an example of what being a bilingual student is like. He wrote, “Being a bilingual student is like I’m flying.”

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**References**


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Everyone has a story to tell: all you need to do is ask and listen. As a way of telling their stories, the intermediate-level adult students I teach create paper memory quilts. The quilts are made up of individual panels, drawn by students, that represent some of the key moments and thoughts in their lives. Panel by panel, week after week, we construct memory quilts as a way to get to know and bond with each other.

Having learners create art about their key life experiences helps them reveal the qualities that make them distinct individuals (see Zimmerman 2004). By encouraging students to use art to tap into their memories and by encouraging students to recall their past, you can help them reveal the great richness of their lives. Often, when one person shares a memory, listeners will respond in kind and talk about their memories, thus creating an exchange of language and ideas.

Students are encouraged to draw on the panels, or write on them and discuss them. Often the panels serve as entry points to encourage students to elaborate on their panels and write more detailed essays about the particular memory that was depicted. This project recognizes and honors the students as human beings with a history behind them and a future ahead of them rather than just as students who are trying to improve their English skills.

**Art Taps Memories, Promotes Fluency**

I came to the idea of encouraging students to create memory quilts based on my own love of old, hand-sewn quilts that have been handed down from generation to generation. In sewing these quilts, the creators would come out of the silences of their hard lives and open up to each other, much in the same way I want the ESL students I teach to communicate with each other. In language education, the excitement of self-expression through art can draw students into meaningful communication (e.g., Schuman 1992). That is, students are encouraged to use their language capacity to communicate in real time. This follows Skehan’s (1998) definition of fluency.

Creating artwork such as the memory quilts I describe here is a form of task-based learning and teaching. While writing or talking about their memories, students are engaged in processing their linguistic output to produce messages that are concise and relevant (Swain 1995).

I see the value of this memory art project after the panels are completed. Each time a student creates a new paper panel, I invite that student to talk about the memory the panel evoked as we all gather at the blackboard or wall on which the paper quilt panels are taped. Suddenly, as the students describe their panels to the others and elaborate on the content, their words come out more easily and fluently. Their sentences...
are smoother as they speak about the memories these panels represent. Often their eyes light up with the joy of the memory, a smile appears on their face, and their voice becomes stronger and more musical as they talk about the people and experiences in their lives that are very important to them. The other students often begin to comment on these memories, asking questions or commenting on their own customs or traditions. An exchange of thoughts begins to take place, again enhancing language fluency and communication.

**Art Releases Emotions, Lessens Stress**

Expressing themselves through drawing, writing, and speaking helps students better weather the enormous stress most of them experience as they learn English and adjust to life far away from their original homes. Students tell me that one of the major reasons for the stress they feel is that they become overwhelmed by the pressures they experience and often lock their feelings inside.

Creating art and writing can help students find some release and hope as they cope with grief and sad times. One very quiet student who was often shy in class, for example, drew a panel in memory of her brother-in-law, who had just died. Creating the panel became a way for her to come to terms with the grief of her loss. In pointing to her panel on the wall, she finally found the words to talk about the feelings she had been holding inside her.

**Prompting Panel Topics**

A person is a little like a patchwork quilt, the patches being accumulated experiences, memories, hopes—and even tears. And as students fill in the blank panels for the paper quilt, they tell the stories of their lives, much the same way quilters did in sewing together their cloth quilts.

Students can include many subjects in their panels: key events in their history, special qualities they have, enjoyable or sad times they have experienced, or their hopes and dreams for the future, such as having a baby or becoming a professional. They might also create panels about memories of people they love and have celebrated events with, friendship, food, a favorite author, or the things they think are wonderful. In class, I often write question prompts to help students get started, such as My Happiest Memory, Something Wonderful, My Greatest Achievement, Someone or Something I Love, My Hopes and Dreams, or A Sad Time.

One Chinese student depicted a happy memory of eating wonderful food and exchanging gifts as he celebrated the Chinese New Year with his family. Another student, from the Dominican Republic, drew a panel about her goal of one day becoming an entrepreneur. A student from Japan drew a happy memory of the time she and her friends had a Halloween party and wore masks and costumes. Another student from Japan drew a panel of her favorite foods placed on a dish, with names and descriptions for each. One student from Russia drew a happy moment when he had climbed some tall mountains in his country.

**Supplies and Procedures**

Paper memory quilts can be made up of individual cardboard panels. A good size is 7 inches by 7 inches (approximately 17 centimeters by 17 centimeters), although panels can be larger if you prefer. You will need a few simple supplies: oak tag or cardboard; crayons, colored pencils, or markers; copies of students’ favorite family photos; scissors; glue; and maybe some old magazines from which students can cut out photos that help them present their memories. For example, a student might paste a picture of the beach on a panel to show a vacation memory.

During the weekly class period when students create panels, I bring in crayons, pencils, and markers in a variety of colors. I have found that, no matter how old the students are, they immediately respond to the smell and touch of the crayons and recall the pleasure they used to experience as children when coloring and making art. As my adult students draw, I usually play some quiet, meditative music to help them relax and to create a peaceful atmosphere.
atmosphere in which they can consider their memories and feelings to create their art. These sessions usually last a half hour to forty-five minutes, with students always asking for even more time because they find the drawing experience a relief from the constant pressure of having to perform in class.

I encourage students to sign and date each panel and to write on the back the thoughts they had in creating it or any information that sheds more light on the memory or event depicted on the front. As the students complete their panels, I pin or tape them on a wall so that the students can see the entire class paper memory quilt emerge in front of their eyes. As the quilts grow in size and detail over the weeks, they become a manifestation of the students’ shared learning experiences during that term. To preserve the panels after you displace them, you might store them in a folder to be referred to from time to time, the same way many people keep photograph albums or store treasures in a special chest that they open from time to time.

If you teach children, the making of a heritage quilt could be part of a “Grandparents Day” program in which students invite family members or older neighbors to school for the day to share their life stories. You might even encourage them to bring old family photos showing them when they were young, perhaps even passports or immigration papers, and ask them to prepare a special food dish to share and taste.

Having students create memory quilts helps me do what I have long believed is a key part of my job as a teacher of students who are learning English: help them find their voice as speakers and as full human beings.


References


Bill Zimmerman teaches writing at College of Mount St. Vincent Institute for Immigrant Concerns in Manhattan, the New York Public Library, and the Riverside Learning Center, in the United States.
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A Career Fair Brings the Real World into the ESL Classroom

by Leona Mason

Situation

In January, our district’s six high school ESL teachers began discussing how to make an economics unit come alive in our classrooms. Our unit objectives were simple: We wanted to show the students the economic value of higher education in order to encourage them to stay in school, show them how bilingualism is a marketable skill in order to encourage them to maintain their first language, and show them that agricultural work is not the only job option for immigrants in our area, rural North Carolina, in the United States.

The students would need to explore the economic concepts of luxury and necessity, learn about making trade-offs and compromises, and understand borrowing and saving money. We wanted them to consider their personal interests, investigate some professions, and evaluate how they could live in our area on an entry-level income. Finally, we wanted them to improve their overall English language proficiency and develop the vocabulary necessary for communicating about these objectives, regardless of their baseline proficiency (beginning or intermediate level).

Needed: A Grand Event

As we began to discuss how we could pull these objectives together, we tried to define some grand event that would excite the students and give them a concrete reason for using English. Someone proposed getting community members to come to the classes and talk about their jobs. But not every teacher had the community contacts to bring a large variety of speakers to class. Furthermore, while some speakers would be willing to come to the schools in the town, fewer might be willing to drive to the outlying schools in the county.

That’s when one teacher proposed bringing students to a centralized location to hear speakers talk about their jobs. Our director then presented her nonnegotiable conditions. She reminded us that, in the interest of equity, all high school ESL students had to be given a reasonable chance of participating in whatever event we organized. Therefore, we had to hold the event during school hours, we had to arrange transportation for students to and from the event, and the event had to be free for students and inexpensive for the department. Essentially, these factors established certain time limits. If the event were held in the morning, students would need to return to their schools in time for lunch since some receive free lunch at school. If the event were held after lunch, students would need to return to their schools in time to catch their buses home.

Our discussion became more involved, and our ideas grew, resulting in a complex unit of study. The unit was roughly divided into three six-week sections to correspond with our marking periods. The first section involved career exploration and included the district’s first Career Fair for ESL Students. Approximately sixty ESL students with
varying proficiency levels and representing eight different language groups participated. The fair was the most memorable and successful program we high school teachers had organized to date.

Preparing the Students
We began by building background (Echevarria, Vogt, and Short 2004). Students learned the names of occupations, some basic job duties, places of employment, and career clusters. We used picture cards to give new arrivals and beginning-level students the basic language they would need. For example, we grouped a fisherman card with two other cards, one depicting catches fish and the other, in a boat. Intermediate-level students used appropriately leveled resources, such as low-level nonfiction books and a simplified encyclopedia, to glean similar information.

After all the students could identify basic information for the various jobs, they sorted them into career clusters and made posters. Again, the new arrivals and beginning-level students relied on the picture cards; the intermediate-level students used their own notes. All students discussed how the careers in the clusters were alike and whether a particular career could be placed in a different cluster.

Once students had mastered these concepts, they began exploring their personal career interests. The teachers created a career interest inventory to meet the language levels of the students, based on a few career inventories that were gathering dust in one school’s guidance office. While the modified inventory was not scientifically proven to successfully match students with careers, the results helped the students pick six careers to research. Using a variety of materials, including low-level books, closed-captioned videos, the Internet, and simplified career encyclopedias, the ESL students found answers to a number of questions that the class and teacher had developed together: How much education do you need? How much is your salary? What do you need to wear to work? What is your most important job duty? These questions would be practiced extensively at the upcoming Career Fair.

Organizing the Career Fair
The students were now ready to talk in English to living, breathing professionals. Meanwhile, the ESL teachers had been working behind the scenes arranging speakers, a location, and student transportation.

Rotations and Career Stations
The most central location in our district (getting from one high school to another in our district can take an hour) was the pre-K center, which housed an auditorium-sized meeting room and the ESL department’s offices. To ensure that the high school students didn’t interfere with the pre-K classes or with office operations, we created a highly structured format that kept students rotating from station to station within well-defined areas of the building: the auditorium, an adjoining hallway, and a conference room.

We organized the fair so that every ESL student would meet with five professionals, each at a separate station. The professionals would talk for ten to twelve minutes, giving an overview of their job. Then the ESL students would have three to five minutes to ask...
questions and five minutes to change stations. No more than four students would meet with a professional at a time, and each professional was scheduled a twenty-minute break at some point during the fair.

A list of professionals was compiled a week before the event, and students were asked to select and rank their top five choices. We reminded them that their choices were not guaranteed but that we’d do our best to schedule a session with at least their top three choices. Twenty-one professionals, all recruited by one ESL teacher, participated in the fair: an engineer, a daycare director, a manufacturer, a personal trainer, a photojournalist, a singer, an agricultural specialist, a veterinarian, a psychologist, a health care representative, an interpreter, a journalist, a research scientist, a nautical archeologist, police officers, a firefighter, a banker, a building contractor, a medical office administrator, a bookstore owner, and an artist.

Since the ESL department lacks the computer equipment and the software to create student schedules, we took the students’ schedule cards and did some old-fashioned hand sorting. While a bit tedious, this process allowed us to consider group dynamics and proficiency levels in a way that a computer program might not. For example, we kept an even mix of beginning- and intermediate-level students in each session, and we made sure new arrivals were paired with people in their ESL classes, knowing they’d be supportive of each other. We also knew from classroom experience which students worked well together and which students did not, so we were able to avoid placing certain students together.

Packets and Tasks
To hold students accountable for participation, we asked them to find answers to the much-rehearsed research questions they had created in preparing for the fair. We made student packets consisting of a folder with paper, a pen, a name tag, a map of the building showing the stations, and a personal schedule. The folders and name tags were color-coded to correspond with the student’s high school; this system helped the chaperones and professionals readily identify the student’s ESL teacher, if necessary.

With two days left to go, we gave the students their packets and reviewed some details. We reminded them that they were representing the school and that they should dress for the fair in compliance with the district’s dress code. We briefly discussed how to behave appropriately during the refreshment period at the end of the sessions, when the students would have time to socialize with other students and the professionals. Then it was simply a matter of collecting permission slips and getting everyone on the buses.

Memorable Contacts
On the day of the Career Fair, ESL teachers took turns staffing the help table, taking pictures, and blowing a whistle to signal the end of sessions. We circulated around the area and observed the students’ reactions to the professionals. I felt a tremendous sense of pride while watching my students ask informed questions, use the vocabulary they had learned, and engage in conversation with the professionals. They were genuinely excited, and they were learning.

“The police officer said that out of 100 police officers [in our area], just three speak Spanish,” a student told me between sessions. I had worried that this student might drop out. Now he’s staying in school and considering a career in law enforcement. “I had a beautiful time at the Career Fair,” a beginning-level student told her teacher later. “The best part was when I learned how the people became professional.”

Four other students were happy to learn that they would be credited on a music CD since they helped the singer learn to pronounce the Spanish lyrics of the song “La Bamba.” Most students indicated that they wished they had had time to meet all the professionals at the fair.

“We tried to define some grand event that would excite the students and give them a concrete reason for using English.”
Another student told his ESL teacher that the Career Fair had been his first field trip. “I was nervous about going,” he said, “because it was the first time I met important people.”

The professionals seemed to have learned as much as the students. Some of them hadn’t realized that different language groups were represented in our schools. Others said that they had been nervous about speaking with students who were learning English but that they had relaxed when they saw how interested and serious the students were. A few left with names and contact information of students they intended to hire in the near future.

The Seeds of Possibility
At the end of the fair, after all the students had boarded the buses to go back to school, the ESL teachers gathered once again around the conference table, this time to reflect and breathe a sigh of relief. The students would have thank-you letters to write, surveys to complete, and discussions to wrap up the event, but these products would only confirm what we already knew: with just a few weeks of planning, we’d accomplished the goal of education; we’d planted seeds of possibility in our students’ minds.

Reference

Leona Mason works as a high school and middle school ESL teacher for Pitt County Schools, North Carolina, in the United States.
am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.
—Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Ulysses”

The multiethnic, multicultural nature of the United States has, over the years, served the nation well and made it a thriving community. The diversity of cultures did not, however, become common or problematic until quite late in the twentieth century. For a large part of U.S. history, people, whether immigrants or native born, tended to stay in one place mostly among their “own kind.” Today, however, with the fluctuating job market, and the use of the Internet, young teachers from one part of the country might well find their first job opportunity at the other side of the continent and experience the kind of culture shock usually associated with a move from one country to another.

Frustrated and angry, Susie Atkinson, who had moved from Pennsylvania, in the eastern United States, to teach in Arizona, in the West, was tearful during a visit to my office. She was in her second year of teaching in a Yuma elementary school and had unmistakably reached the frustration stage of culture shock.

“I can’t bear it any longer,” Susie wailed. “It’s not just the heat … it’s the attitude I can’t stand. These people just feel that everyone is here to service them. They have no sense of time. They spoil their kids no end. They never show up for scheduled meetings. They barge in whenever they feel like it. They expect you to be at their beck and call at all hours, and they are constantly talking in Spanish.”

“You were pretty happy when you came to see me last January,” I reminded her.

“Yes, I was,” Susie agreed. “I was really excited. Everything did seem OK in January. It’s just that now ….”

What exactly had happened? I wondered.

Susie thought for a moment, and then it all came out in a torrent: “When I came, the weather was just gorgeous after the bitter cold we were having in Pennsylvania, and I did love my kinder-kids. I knew about ESL. I thought that I was doing a pretty good job, but now they have assigned me the sixth grade. Many of these kids still don’t speak English. They are supposed to read chapters and write essays. How can I teach them if they can’t even write a simple sentence? And the parents don’t speak English, so when I do see them, I have to use my Spanish-speaking aide as a translator.”

This episode stands as a clear example of the pressures that teachers, particularly new teachers, can be faced with when moving.
Struggling through the Stages

The term culture shock has been used since the 1950s (Hall 1959, 1976; Triandis 1994; Cusnher, Mclelland, and Safford 2006). The phenomenon consists of some specific and rather well-defined stages: euphoria, shock and rejection, gradual recovery, full recovery with self-awareness, and, finally, possible acculturation.

The first happy excitement stage, in which everything seems delightful, interesting, and friendly, was no doubt the stage that Susie had experienced in January. The shock and rejection phase, with its confusion, apprehension, and anxiety, is, however, almost inevitable (Brown and Eisterhold 2004). Overcoming this negative stage to reach self-awareness and growth requires considerable self-examination and open-mindedness (Furnham 1989). Those who move successfully through this stage are rewarded with greater open-mindedness and a more vivid and broad understanding of the human condition.

Susie was enrolled in my graduate-level culture class. About half of the in-service and potential teachers taking the class were locals, and the other half seemed to flounder in the same spot on the culture line as Susie did. As the class moved from learning about obvious, explicit markers of culture, such as food, music, tradition, and language, to the infinitely more subtle and tacit essences, such as concepts of beauty, time, friendship, hospitality, family, leadership, and authority, Susie and her classmates kept weekly cross-cultural journals. Through their reflections, many of the participants came to a gradual sense of greater understanding of cultural influences. The journals helped the in-service and potential teachers see issues from several perspectives and note how much of their emotional and ethical life is shaped by culture.

Individual Writing, Group Response

For the journals, I divided the class into (preferably) multicultural groups of six participants. As a prompt, I read a culturally problematic situation (see the box) or explained the context of a film snippet to be viewed. The participants then had ten minutes to respond to the prompt in writing. Afterward, they passed their paper to a classmate, who read it and spent two minutes writing a response. All the participants in each group then read and commented on all other group members’ papers.

A general class discussion emerged from the issues raised through the prompt. The participants then wrote a final journal entry relating to any point that had been brought up during the discussion. In the last entry in the journal, written at the conclusion of the course, the participants commented on the entire journal experience.

Thinking through cultural issues in writing and noting the way classmates responded to the issues allowed for some serious assessment and brought about interesting and valuable self-examination. The prompt in the box, for example, brought out how time operates in various cultures and what cultural parameters are expected in the notion of friendship.

Film Clips as Cross-Cultural Prompts

Snippets from culturally sensitive films such as Selina (Nava 1997), Stand and Deliver (Menendez 1988), The Long Walk Home (Pierce 1991), and Nell (Apted 1994) also worked well as prompts. For example, in the restaurant scene in the film Stand and Deliver, a mathematics teacher attempts to convince a Hispanic father that his daughter is college material. Among the cultural issues that emerge are the role of women, fatalism, and the influence of family. This rich source for intercultural reflection and discussion served us well in our journal exchange.

From the film Selina, participants watched a scene during which the famous South Texas singer’s Mexican American family is in a car traveling toward Mexico. Selina’s father explains how and why their language and cultural knowledge will not be sufficient on the other side of the border. The scene brings out issues of biculturalism, bilingualism, double loyalties, and cultural misunderstandings. During a discussion of the film, a participant commented that she belonged to two countries: “I live in one country, but the other country lives in me, and I can’t get it out.”

The film Nell is particularly appealing and effective as a prompt for multicultural reaction journals because it displays culture shock so precisely without touching on either race or ethnicity. In the film, Nell is a young woman who experienced a very isolated upbringing in the wilderness of North Carolina, where her mother and twin sister evolved a family culture that included all the elements of language, tradition, attitude, behavior, and mind-sets found in all cultures. When Nell must engage with the larger culture outside her small world, her transition includes all the stages of culture shock and thus provides ample material for analysis of each phase. The film also gives intriguing glimpses into academic and teenage microcultures.

The Long Walk Home, an award-winning film dealing with the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott of 1959, also offers good material for exploring culture. The film features the friendship between a white woman and her African American maid. A Christmas dinner scene, in which...
prejudice is blatantly displayed and accepted as normal, offers extensive possibilities for journal exploration. I usually outline the situation and explain who is present at the table. The participants write the possible dinner conversation that might emerge and then watch the scene. The discussion that emerges is invariably rich and interesting.

“Those People” Become “My People”

Journals and video are regularly used in language classes. I would encourage teachers to consider modifying the cross-cultural activities I have described for their lessons. The course and the multicultural reaction journals were not a universal remedy for culture shock, but there were definite moments when “those people” became “my people.” With time and growth, Susie’s culture shock might just evolve into a celebration of the very great wealth of “all that she has met” and all that she shares with the diverse students and teachers she encounters.

References


Natalie Hess, professor of bilingual/multicultural education at Northern Arizona University, in the United States, is the author and coauthor of several ESL textbooks and teacher resource books.
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### Making Your Own Internet Corpus

Commercially prepared corpora include a great deal of information about the texts, but you can also make the corpora you need for your classroom quickly from the Internet by using search engines or by cutting and pasting material from existing Web pages into concordancing software. Search engines,

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Promoters of corpus linguistics have promised that their work and approach will bring major changes in the way language teachers teach and create materials. But the basic question remains: How can you bring this seemingly technologically complex approach to analyzing language into the classroom now?

In this article, we describe simple tasks that will show you the power of corpus approaches to language analysis. If you have a computer and a fairly fast Internet connection, you and the students you teach have access to the large amounts of authentic language on millions of Internet Web pages. By using some of the simpler methods of corpus linguistics with Internet search engines,

- Nonnative-English-speaking teachers can have the same insight into language usage as native-speaking teachers do.
- Native speakers of one variety of English can have access to other varieties.
- Students of almost all levels can learn to use easy tools to research language, resulting in lessons that are more learner centered.

### It’s Just a Text

Basically, a corpus (plural: corpora) is just a text, long or short. Corpora can range in size from millions of words, as in the British National Corpus (see http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/) and the American National Corpus (see http://americannationalcorpus.org/), to many fewer words for smaller, specialized corpora.
such as Google (http://www.google.com/), can be a source of “quick-and-dirty” corpora that will give you a general idea about how a term or collocation is used. Remember, however, that the results are approximations and not very scientific, so you’ll need to find huge differences or trends in your results to be confident that you’re on the right track. Also remember that Internet search results contain mainly written forms and that, as a result of the complex search formulas that search engines use, your results may differ slightly from ours.

Is It Wrong, or Is It Just Another Variety of English?
You can use an Internet search to show how speakers of one variety of English can learn about forms in other varieties. Getting an idea of the distribution can influence your approach to teaching these forms.

Fill in this blank: This article is very different _____ the last article I read. There are basically three possible answers depending on the variety of English you speak:

This article is very different from the last article I read.

This article is very different to the last article I read.

This article is very different than the last article I read.

You may have heard all three, but if you speak or have studied mainly British English, you might never have heard different than. On the other hand, if you speak or have studied American English, you might never have encountered different to. In fact, over the years, we’ve had to explain to novice American EFL teachers that different to is acceptable for many English speakers in the world. 

We learned that the students were indeed using the first term correctly, but that they had to come up with a different, more common alternative for the second one.

Results 1-10 of about 1,900,000 for deliverables.

Results 1-10 of about 22 for globasm.
Exploring these forms with a search engine can shed some light on the differences. First, in the search box at http://www.google.com/ or another search engine, type in “different from,” with the quotation marks (so that Google looks for that exact phrase, not the separate words). You should get about 7.7 million hits, or occurrences, meaning that the phrase is used almost 8 million times on the Internet. You now know that this phrase is the form usually used in writing.

Now type in the British version, “different to” (again with the quotation marks), which Americans may consider incorrect because they never hear it used by native speakers. The result is only about 797,000 hits. Obviously, many fewer people use this phrase in writing, but the number of hits shows that the form is very common. If the result had been only a couple of thousand hits, you would need to look into the issue further.

Try searching for the American spoken form, “different than” (again with the quotation marks). British speakers, many of whom never hear this form, might consider it incorrect. The result: about 2.3 million hits. Many people use different than in writing, but different from is the clear winner in writing on the Internet. You can use this information to decide what to tell students about choosing one of these forms over the others.

Is It an English Word?
You or the students you teach can use a search engine to see if a term or grammatical form exists in English. Or you can determine if a technical collocation or form that your students insist is used in English in their area of specialization actually occurs. This type of search can give nonnative English speakers the same technological edge as native speakers in determining the correctness of an English term.

For example, while reading papers from a class we were team teaching, we (both native speakers of American English) encountered two words, deliverables and globasm, that seemed wrong to us. Two students insisted that the words were normal, technical terms in their field. When we searched for

Corpora and Concordancing Resources


This three-hour tutorial is a concise introduction to many sources for corpora and gives good examples of how to use concordancers to investigate language.


This book teaches the basics of designing and using corpora for both monolingual and bilingual tasks.


You could search the corpora provided by this relatively simple online concordancer for use in many types of classes, or you could use the corpus in class. Also included are links to other useful sites.


This site gives you access to several major corpora (such as the British National Corpus and the Brown Corpus). Also see Professor Cobb’s home page, which provides tools for teachers and students to test their knowledge of English “against” corpus data.
them using Google, the results were almost two million hits for deliverables but only twenty-two hits for globasm. Obviously, the second term is not yet commonly used in English. We learned that the students were indeed using the first term correctly, but that they had to come up with a different, more common alternative for the second one.

**Is It an English Expression?**
We once encountered a collocation that did not seem acceptable to us: duties and liabilities. We wanted the student to use the collocation duties and responsibilities instead. Our search engine results showed that our suggestion was the most common collocation: duties and responsibilities resulted in 1.4 million hits. However, duties and liabilities did have 38,000 hits, so it is acceptable in certain contexts, which we could see from the examples the search engine listed.

We then wanted to see other common collocations with duties. By typing in “duties and,” in quotation marks, we found duties and rights, with around 36,000 hits, and, surprisingly for us, duties and taxes, with around 144,000 hits. We had completely forgotten that duties can also be a type of import tax.

**Is It Grammatical?**
Like many teachers, we sometimes find ourselves in situations where students challenge our knowledge of the language with contradictory statements from an EFL grammar text. Our final example from a graduate syntax class in the United States shows how both native and nonnative speakers can use search engines to investigate language forms.

As we were diagramming the phrase I hope to..., a graduate student from a Southeast Asian country told the class of native speakers that she had been taught that the form was ungrammatical. She had learned and then had taught that only the form I hope (that) I ... was acceptable.

The disagreement presented the class with a great teaching/learning moment. We stopped our discussion of syntactic theory and quickly searched for the two forms on Google: I hope to resulted in 3.5 million hits; I hope (that) I, in 3 million hits. The results were convincing for native and nonnative speakers alike: obviously, both forms are acceptable.

**Beyond Search Engine Linguistics**
After you and your students have worked with search engines, you may want more precise corpora and tools. Your next step would be to learn to use a concordancer to perform advanced analyses of texts. For example, a concordancer can list all the words of a text by frequency, give you collocations in a text for a specific term, or do a key word in context (KWIC) search, which shows you the exact context in which a specific word occurs in the corpus. With KWIC searches, you or your students can explore, for example, the different contexts in which small and little are used. For sites that give free access to concordancers, see the box; see also “Corpus-Based Tools for Efficient Writing Instruction,” Essential Teacher, September 2005.

Our examples of using search engines may give you ideas on how corpus linguistics can influence your teaching. You might collaborate with your colleagues and students on ideas for your classes.

Charles Hall teaches applied linguistics at the University of Memphis, in the United States. Debra S. Lee is founder and director of Legal English for Academic and Professional Purposes and is on the faculty of Nashville State Community College, in the United States.
Corpus (a collection of texts from written and spoken sources gathered for the purpose of language analysis) is currently a buzzword in English language teaching. The corpora that inform today’s English learners’ dictionaries run into millions of words taken from newspapers, books, radio, TV, and conversations of people chatting in bars. In this article, I make a case for the value of corpora in portraying language accurately, show how corpora can contribute to testing, and explain how a corpus of learner language can inform classroom tests.

Language in Practice, Not in Theory
The value of using corpora lies in the fact that they highlight language as people actually speak and write it rather than as people think they do. An example is the distinction made by English usage manuals between fewer (used with countable nouns; for example, fewer ships) and less (used with uncountable nouns; for example, less tonnage).

To test how robust the distinction is, you can consult a corpus. A free sample search of the British National Corpus (see http://sara.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/lookup.html) shows that less readily occurs with plural countable nouns:

... and we get less and less resources ...
... Ferguson’s got less players in his squad ...

You may dismiss this usage as casual or deviant, but consider these examples from Close’s (1992) book on pedagogical grammar:

This suit cost less than twenty pounds.
Our house is less than a hundred metres from the station. (p. 54)

It would sound decidedly odd to replace less with fewer here. Close suggests that less is normal when referring to a sum of money or distance. In fact, less has a long history of going with plural nouns, and fewer/less effectively operate in free variation. This is far from an isolated example. Corpora frequently show up prescriptive approaches to language as old-fashioned, conservative, or plain wrong.

Bringing Large Corpora into Testing
Although corpora could be used in a number of ways in testing, there has been little progress in the ten years since Alderson (1996) wrote, “in the assessment of language learning and proficiency—language testing—corpora have yet to find an application” (p. 249). Here are some ways corpora have been employed in testing.
Standardized Testing

Some uses of corpora in testing are focused more on the needs of researchers than on those of teachers. There is considerable academic interest in using corpora to validate the criterion-referenced descriptors of public tests like the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). It is common for performance tests to anchor scores to bands that describe a typical performance at that level.

The descriptor for IELTS band 6, for example, states, “Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations” (*IELTS Handbook* 2005, 4). Corpora can support the validity of the descriptors (and therefore the test) by linking the wording employed to a coherent theory of second language acquisition (Purpura 2004, 159). Thus, in the IELTS descriptor above, “complex” could be backed up by analyzing test takers’ output and relating it to a list of complex grammatical structures that are representative of communication at that level.

Classroom Tests

A more practical application of corpora is to use them to supply authentic language for test items, such as reading texts and multiple-choice questions (Hargreaves 2000). For example, imagine that you want to test the phrasal verb *put out*. You would look up a selection of concordance lines for *put out*, choose a line that illustrates the usage, cut and paste it, then replace the verb with a gap to make a cloze question: *Firemen tried to free the injured and _____ (1) the blaze.*

Making these items is not as straightforward as it looks. Concordance lines are usually quite messy, and once you remove them from their context, they are difficult to understand. Finding suitable examples is time-consuming, and you almost always have to tidy up the text a little. There are also copyright issues involved in using texts found in public media like the Internet.

The Solution: A Corpus of Students’ Work

In fact, the ideal corpus for classroom testing is much closer to home: a corpus of students’ work. The corpus does not have to be electronic: it can simply be a record of your students’ work, including homework, written assignments, notes on oral activities, portfolios, assessment tasks, and e-mail communication. The size and variety of the corpus depend on your teaching environment and your resources for collecting the data. You can compile the corpus manually, but you may want to use software to make access and analysis convenient; one popular concordancer is Wordsmith Tools (see http://www.lexically.net/wordsmith.com/; see also the resources listed in “Creating ‘Quick-and-Dirty’ Corpora with Search Engines,” in this issue).

The advantage of using a personalized corpus to create classroom tests is that it is tailored to your teaching situation and your learners’ needs and proficiency. And although much of the literature and research in corpus linguistics is centred around massive collections of data, small corpora are equally valid and probably more relevant at a classroom level (on small corpora, see Ghadessy, Henry, and Roseberry 2001).

A Corpus of Learners’ Errors

Regular progress testing is an important part of the curriculum in my language school in Russia. Like many teachers, my colleagues and I have two problems when it comes to testing: the poor quality of existing tests and a lack of time to improve them.

For speed and ease, we usually use back-of-the-book photocopiable tests based on the course book syllabus, but the content validity of the tests is poor, as they are written for a generic audience, not specific sets of learners. For example, an intermediate-level test for adults contains a large section on *backshift*, the sequence of tenses in reported speech. Reported speech is a problem area for Russian students, but not because of backshift, as there is a similar phenomenon in Russian. The difficulty for Russians is complementation.  

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with reporting verbs, such as deny + gerund or insist + prepositional phrase. These patterns are not covered in the standard tests at the intermediate level, so our tests do not measure what we want them to measure.

To address the poor validity of progress tests, I have built up a corpus of learners' errors, as error indicates a gap in competence. Going through written work and listening to students' speaking tasks, I note language errors and categorise them as lexical, grammatical, or pronunciation related. A few examples from my corpus follow:

*A number of us likes it (grammar: subject-verb concord)

*I want to be as thin as her (vocabulary: Slim is the appropriate word.)

*A fire BROKE out there (pronunciation: Stress should be on OUT.)

I also write down the level of the student who made the error, the date, and the context, for example,

*I will go to cinema tomorrow (grammar: wrong future construction when talking of plans + lack of article; preintermediate, 11.02.05, small talk at end of class)

What I end up with is a small but very rich record of my students' developmental stages. My corpus is a handy size for me to identify patterns and trends in learners' production. For example, the corpus has revealed the following list of typical grammatical minefields for the advanced Russian students I teach:"

The corpus does not have to be electronic: it can simply be a record of your students' work.
idiomatic use of articles (e.g., *the Moon vs. Mars*)

periphrastic versus 's possessive structures (e.g., *the leg of the yacht race vs. the boy's leg*)

extraposition (e.g., *it is interesting that …*)

verbs occurring predominantly in the passive voice (e.g., *to be situated, to be dazed, to be stranded*)

order of adverbs (e.g., *it hardly luckily rained*)

Next, I test the areas the corpus indicated as problematic. As the errors are classified by level and type, it is relatively easy to slot suitable question types into the existing progress tests. I do not completely rewrite the tests, since much of the content is relevant, but I add specific questions addressing the students' weaknesses.

**Linking Teaching and Testing with Personalized Corpora**

My colleagues have also contributed to this ongoing project. At first the corpus consisted of a pile of papers at the back of my locker, but I have begun to enter the data onto a home computer to make the corpus more accessible as it gets larger.

My experience shows that small, personalized corpora are a powerful and practical resource for teaching and testing, as you can integrate the insights gained from working with real data into both areas. And if you write your own tests, keeping a corpus of learners' work means that the tests you create are likely to be based on the teaching programme—without much increase in your workload.

**References**


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Comments like these by trainees in the South Korean corporation I work for prompted me to agree to write a course book for the first time. In the business courses I teach, oral communicative competency is emphasized, with little concern for writing proficiency. However, recently, there has been a dawning realization that the students’ writing skills are not on a par with Western standards. This realization emerged from three sources: (1) the students’ responses on program evaluations, which clearly stated the necessity for more writing practice; (2) the teachers’ recommendations to emphasize writing skills; and (3) the company’s global expansion, which requires faster, more efficient business communication.

The course was designed as a five-week elective for twenty-five intermediate-level company employees preparing to be relocated overseas for English language study, acculturation, and professional development. For the course, I created a book consisting of eight units: an introductory unit focusing on the customs and conventions of e-mail; a basic foundation unit; five units, each with a specific topic, rhetorical writing style, and supportive language (see the box for examples); and a consolidating unit. Each unit contains e-mail writing samples, exercises targeting a particular grammar structure, and two e-mail writing assignments. The first assignment involves peer editing and revision, and the second reinforces the material learned in that unit.

**Designing the Course Content**

Teaching mature adults who are well educated, motivated, and focused presented many challenges. Foremost among these were the need to design writing assignments that were authentic and the need to acclimate learners to peer editing, which was new to them.

**The Challenge of Authenticity**

The writing tasks had to be based on the learners’ needs and written interactions they might be involved in while living overseas. As Tomlinson (1999) writes, course books need to be localized so that they make connections to the learners’ real world.

I had to consider what the trainees’ needs would be in places such as Bangalore, London, New York, and Singapore. Trainees’ needs also affected the variety and sophistication of activities. I did not want to insult their intelligence. Questions surfaced: How would I know when I had enough or too many activities? What about the variety of activities? Did the activities work successfully in each unit and in the book as a whole?
In every unit, I inserted one or two e-mail examples to model content and form because many trainees lacked exposure to the standards of formal written English discourse. Since Korean writers hold the reader responsible for interpreting the text (Lee and Scarcella 1992), the modeling guided the trainees and built their confidence so that they would take responsibility for their writing.

**Easing into Peer Editing**

Peer-editing forms required special attention because many of the trainees had never been exposed to this type of editing. At the beginning of the course, I simplified these forms so that the students would not be overwhelmed by the process.

Building trust and confidence in a peer’s evaluation and suggested corrections was another problem. I knew that the trainees would question why they should pay attention to their peers’ comments when the peers were not highly proficient in English. I could hear them thinking: What do the other students know? And I could imagine their response: Only the teacher knows what is right and wrong. By keeping the peer-editing process simple at the beginning, the confidence and trust issues dissipated, and over time trainees became more comfortable giving and receiving comments.

Gradually, I had the trainees use peer-editing forms that were more complex and required more detailed feedback. At that point, the trainees were in a better position to give comments and suggestions, having experienced a gradual buildup of complexity. To my surprise, halfway through the course, some trainees began using error correction comments on the peer-editing sheets that mimicked my own. Some of the high-intermediate-level learners were using my techniques for error correction as a model for their own comments on colleagues’ writing. It was very satisfying to see that they had applied my methods appropriately.

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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Rhetorical Writing Style</th>
<th>Supportive Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making personal introductions and appointments</td>
<td>None [focus on peer editing]</td>
<td>Model phrases for introducing oneself (e.g., I would like to introduce myself …) and making appointments (e.g., Would it be possible to make an appointment …)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making inquiries</td>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Discourse markers (e.g., first, next, then, in conclusion) and questions of inquiry (e.g., Would you be able to …. Is it possible for you to …)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving directions</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Prepositions for placement (e.g., across, beside, next, between) and model phrases for giving directions (e.g., Turn right at the next traffic light …. In front of the museum, you will see …)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting and refusing invitations</td>
<td>Comparison/contrast</td>
<td>Discourse markers for comparison/contrast (e.g., similarly, compared to, more than, less than, in contrast) and model phrases for giving directions (e.g., Please let me know if you can come …. Please accept my apologies …)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing appreciation</td>
<td>Cause/effect</td>
<td>Discourse markers for cause/effect (e.g., however, consequently, therefore, nevertheless) and model phrases for expressing appreciation (e.g., Just a quick note to say…. I really appreciate everything you have done….)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teaching the Course

Because the trainees need to write e-mail daily, they approached the class with a positive attitude and were motivated to improve their writing skills. However, I had to remind them that the class was an elective meeting only for one hour, five days per week for five weeks and that they needed to keep things in perspective. Their writing proficiency would increase somewhat, but they would probably not produce perfectly written e-mails by the end of the course.

Two classes, which consisted of low- to high-intermediate-level level trainees, were selected to pilot the new course material. I was concerned about the degree to which the mixed levels would affect my teaching and the students’ progress. I decided to teach to the middle and up, and, when necessary, spend more time individually with the lower-level trainees. Not surprisingly, like-level learners sat next to each other for comfort, but the members of this class were willing to work together and give advice to one another.

Continual Feedback

At the end of every unit, I asked trainees to submit written feedback on the course content. In addition, during class and immediately after teaching each class, I made notes on what worked well and what needed improvement. I also documented trainee questions that were unexpected or put me in a quandary (for example, in an e-mail thread, how do you know when it is no longer necessary to respond to an incoming e-mail? When do you stop? Are there any rules for this situation?). Ultimately, all of my notes and student feedback would prove invaluable for the rewriting of the course book.

Classroom or Computer Lab?

Initially, I had planned to use both the classroom and the computer lab, as a computer lab is a natural environment for writing e-mail and serves as a nice change of scenery from the regular classroom. Unfortunately, the carrels in the lab hindered interaction. The only advantage was the privacy that the carrels provided when I helped students with errors.

Subsequently, since all the trainees were equipped with laptops, I turned the classroom into a computer lab. This situation was not ideal. The classroom was crowded, and there was no privacy for student-teacher dialogue and error correction. Even though the trainees did not seem to mind, I was disappointed with the classroom situation. One advantage, however, was that I could easily observe mistakes in grammar, structure, and format on the trainees’ laptop screens and respond quickly to the entire class using the board to focus on a teaching point.

E-Mail and Intellectual Status

One of the most intriguing moments of teaching this course was focused around the idea of intellectual status: how the e-mail sender’s intelligence level is perceived by the receiver and how this perception reflects on one’s writing ability and professional image. When we discussed communicating by e-mail with English-speaking foreigners, the trainees raised questions about an issue I believe they had never before considered: the adequacy of language ability and degree of intelligence (of the sender as
perceived by the recipient). Taking advantage of this valuable teaching moment, we discussed what intellectual status meant in reference to their writing. We agreed that this was a point they needed to be conscious of.

Reflection
As a reflective practitioner, I examined my work both in the moment and in retrospect so that I could assess how the design of the e-mail writing course materials affected my teaching and how my teaching affected the design of the course book.

Room for Improvement
From trainee feedback and my copious notes, I realized that I needed better instructions for grammar exercises and more detailed information for e-mail writing tasks. I had assumed, incorrectly, that the trainees would understand my descriptions and instructions. I understood them; why wouldn’t they? On several occasions I found myself providing more detailed directions in class, both orally and written on the board.

Also, I found using the classroom as a computer lab workable but not ideal. An e-mail writing course belongs in the computer lab, but, as mentioned, this was not possible. If I teach the course again, I will request a larger classroom and fewer trainees so they each have more personal space and so the quality of student-teacher dialogue can improve.

If I were to make one design change in the course material, I would insert a third draft for the writing assignments. In the five-week course, there was only time for the teacher to make comments and corrections on a second draft (after peer editing on the first draft). With a third draft, trainees would be able to make final revisions from the teacher’s remarks on the second draft, and the trainees and teacher would be able to clearly see progress and the need for further instruction.

Completely in Charge
In this course, I was completely in charge from soup to nuts for the first time in my career: I designed the course, wrote it, and taught it, and on the way I learned many lessons (see the box for some tips based on my experience). After I finished teaching the course, I reread all of my teaching notes and student feedback. I took one additional week to edit and revise the course text in order to produce a second edition for printing.

The results were well worth the effort, and I have learned two valuable lessons: I have learned how critical it is to test all materials in a class prior to publication, and I have learned to be more accepting of other people’s suggestions for changes in my materials.

References


Kathy Brenner is an English language instructor and materials writer at the Samsung Global Management Institute, in South Korea.
An "aha" moment occurred for me in my ESL composition classroom a few semesters ago. My students were into instant messaging (IM), blogging, and Internet Relay Chat (IRC) gaming. It suddenly dawned on me, an avid technology user and consumer, that I was no longer on the cutting edge.

More importantly, I was struck by the fact that as a result of technology, the international ESL college composition students I taught were living richer lives as writers in English than any of my previous generations of students had. Granted, they are often active as writers outside of the academy in their own languages as they send letters and e-mail home, but because of the international connections they are making through the Internet, much of their communication is in English.

Answering the Wake-up Call
Since that time, more than two years ago, I've been on a quest to examine my own values as a writing and language teacher as they relate to the digital and linguistic literacies that more and more of my students enter the classroom with. I've also made an effort to explore ways to stretch my own digital literacies, not just by playing with new technological toys but by exploring technological aspects of the creation of community and communication.

I hadn't actually considered myself behind in the digital pedagogical world, and the concept of not being with it or even ahead of the game in terms of instructional technology was a shock to my system. I've been a techie for more than two decades. As a first-year college student in 1984, I was selected for a pilot computer-assisted section of college composition and rhetoric. I had taken a basic computer programming course in high school, so I had no fear of the computer, and the class introduced me to online access via UNIX. By 1988 and graduate school, I was using a UNIX-based chat system to stay in touch with friends in Chicago. I was an early text-based Internet browser user in 1994, and I have worked to stay networked at the highest possible speeds ever since.

When Hawisher and Selfe (1999) urged educators to pay attention to how technology was inextricably linked to literacy and literacy education throughout the 1990s, I thought I had heard the call. I worked to help students develop a critical perspective of the social and cultural contexts for online communication by asking them to participate in both virtual and embodied ethnographic research. This was all well and good, but in retrospect, I realize that I had become quite complacent about my digital prowess. When MOOs (multiuser domains, object oriented), MUDs (multiuser dungeons/dimensions), IRC channels, blogs (Web logs), wikis (Web sites that allow easy collaborative editing), MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games), and now even MALLs (mobile-assisted language learning technologies) entered my digital world, I was thrown for a loop.

Critical Questions about Technology and Teaching
My reflections on technology and teaching have centered on a series of questions (see the box)—not new ones or ones that only I am asking, but ones that still seem worth exploring.
I also pose these questions to you and to the profession as a whole. If you are reading the Portal section of Essential Teacher, you probably have either an interest in or possibly a fear of welcoming digital literacies into your classrooms. So to what extent and how do we as teachers welcome these technologies in meaningful ways? Do we stop the welcome wagon when we feel that they cross the boundaries of familiar ideological systems regarding literacy and that the definition has moved beyond our control? Do we stop when we fear that accepting variations of standard practices will lead to rejection of students’ work in other disciplines?

I have spent some time mining these sources, and I still do not have answers to all of my critical questions, as they have engendered even more questions. I have, however, lived the past few semesters as an active digital immigrant, forcing myself to move outside of my own comfort zone and to attempt to participate in the online worlds of my “digital native” students (Prensky 2005, 8).

I signed up for the Computers and Writing 2003 online preconference sponsored by Purdue University and entered a MOO for the first time, but I lurked. I joined a support group chat space for a medical condition, and once again, I lurked. I opened an IM.
account, but no matter how hard I try, I still can’t get myself to write in the fast shorthand that flows from my students’ superfast hands.

These experiences have highlighted for me the value of being back in the learner’s seat and of remembering the sensation of entering a world of communication without feeling as if I knew the language or even the process for learning; it was enlightening. That sense of risk, of exposing myself as a thinker and as a writer, is similar to what some students feel when I ask them to write in a way they haven’t written before, not to mention in English.

That sensation of discomfort is not a bad thing to keep in mind while teaching or to experience on a regular basis. So, in the end, even though my quest is messier now than it was when I started, I will continue to push myself to ask these questions, attempt to answer them, and stretch my own boundaries so that I can continue to develop more insight into the literacy and digital lives of my students. I welcome fellow sojourners.

References


Suzanne Blum Malley is the director of the ESL Program and professor of English at Columbia College Chicago, in the United States.

Portal is edited by Mercedes Rossetti (marossetti@prodigy.net.mx).
Despite the momentous advances in the professional development of international teaching assistants (ITAs) in recent years, the field is still in its infancy. The case studies selected for this volume underscore the social, political, administrative, linguistic, and academic challenges involved in establishing programs and designing the curriculum to prepare ITAs for their professional roles.

Professional Development of International Teaching Assistants
Edited by Dorit Kaufman and Barbara Brownworth

ISBN 193118527-1
Order #271
$37.95 (member $23.95)
Family literacy programs have long had a need for curricula that support families in learning English and assist adult family members to better understand their vital role in their children’s language and literacy development. This book aims to do both. The curriculum in the Parent Workbooks (in both English and Spanish) includes twelve units with twenty-two lessons focused on three parenting areas: Home Language and Culture, School and Culture, and Language and Literacy Development. The program effectively integrates English language skills and parenting skills throughout. Each lesson includes a related activity for parents to do with their children at home.

The carefully organized Teacher’s Resource Manual offers step-by-step suggestions for implementing each activity and thoughtful cultural notes to remind teachers of potential differences among learners. The greatest strength of this curriculum is the way it honors the language, culture, and experiences of families and seeks to build on this foundation. The curriculum targets adult English language learners at the high-beginning to intermediate level who have children in kindergarten through third grade. Teachers will find this curriculum useful but may need to make adaptations since there are few suggestions for multilevel classrooms.

Susan Finn Miller is a teacher educator in southeast Pennsylvania, in the United States.

Teachers of foreign languages will be enthralled with Gelman’s tales of immersion in diverse cultures and her successful attempts to master the local languages. Gelman’s story is fascinating. At age forty-eight, she decided to give up her comfortable life in Los Angeles and become a nomad. She ventured out on her own to remote places such as a Zapotec village in Mexico, an island in the Galapagos, and a rainforest in Borneo, where she got acquainted, often in very assertive and inventive ways, with the local people and their customs. She would strike up conversations and invite herself into homes, ceremonies, or events that led to friendships and amazing experiences. (See http://www.ritagoldengelman.com/ for Gelman’s latest adventures.)

Language teachers are better teachers if they experience different cultures and study new languages. Gelman’s book gave me valuable insights into a different culture and helped me see the world through the eyes of someone in a strange, new culture who is struggling with an unfamiliar language.

Robin Alexander lives and works in Delaware, in the United States.
GlobalEnglish is a convenient online language-learning course that I believe greatly improves students' English skills. All students need is a computer and Internet access. Two drawbacks are that the program is not Macintosh-compatible and that the course is not free (current prices are US$150 for three months; check the Web site for other pricing plans).

Pedagogically, the GlobalEnglish program is sound. It offers a placement test, individualized feedback on student progress, and over 700 hours of general and business English course material from beginning to advanced proficiency levels. The program is available online any time of day or night so students can work at their own pace and on their own time on improving their reading, grammar, vocabulary, listening, and speaking skills. The program provides a mix of various state-of-the-art multimedia activities that utilize text, audio, graphics and animation, record/playback, and speech recognition. In addition, each student receives a personalized study plan with clear learning goals.

Furthermore, the program offers a wide range of resources: a Community space in which students can focus on specific skills; a weekly magazine featuring articles on current topics; a Business Corner containing business-related news articles; World News and Lifestyle and Culture articles; a Business Word of the Day; and a translation and English dictionary. There is also a Game Center where students can choose from a variety of games and activities that include Quiz Show, Crossword Puzzle, Word Search, and Karaoke. Each course in the program tests the students' progress with two review tests and a course progress test. Preparation activities for the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) are also offered. And all of this evaluation is done in a safe and unthreatening environment where no one sees the students' results besides the students and, if they choose, a GlobalEnglish teacher. For administrators, the program offers aggregate and individual progress reports providing information on individual, as well as groups of students. As a result, it is very easy for instructors or administrators to keep track of students' progress, and they can also make announcements to a group or send messages to individual students.

Douglas Forster is a full-time lecturer in the Department of English at Japan Women's University, in Japan.

声 paralyzed


“America is a freedom country.” I have often heard such statements from students and, though I impulsively want to correct their grammar, I realize that I need to try to help them understand what freedom means to Americans, both culturally and politically. The Oscar-nominated film Good Night and Good Luck can spark discussion of this subject in any classroom.

The film follows legendary news anchor Edward R. Murrow in his battle with U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy over McCarthy's blacklisting of suspected Communists in and outside of the U.S. government in the 1950s. Murrow publicly and boldly questioned McCarthy and ultimately helped bring about the end of the senator’s witch hunt. The story of this brief black-and-white film comes directly from life. Documentary footage from McCarthy’s Senate hearings and public statements are used in the film, while Murrow's television broadcasts are recreated and augmented with the behind-the-scenes drama of the newscast's production.

The film provides substance for stimulating class activities. Class discussion on the film could focus on the U.S. ideal that one person can make a difference, whether for good or ill, or on how legitimate protest in the United States, which is encouraged by the Constitution, is not always easy or safe to carry out. Assignments could contrast the media in Morrow’s day with the media of today or examine the social mores of the time, as seen in the secret marriage of two news writers against the strict hiring code of 1950s CBS.

Stephanie Sareeram teaches ESL at Northern Virginia Community College, in the United States.
Software Thumbnails


While the word-processing software Microsoft Word is by no means new, it offers many useful features for ESL/EFL students that you may have overlooked. Two main features that are especially useful in writing courses are Find/Replace and Reviewing (Track Changes).

Find/Replace: Besides finding words they want to replace, writers can use this feature to check for mistakes they commonly make. For example, writers who often mistakenly use informal vocabulary in academic settings may search these informal words, such as a lot or really, and then replace or eliminate them. Or writers who are prone to forgetting an ending quotation mark or parenthesis can search for beginning quotation marks and opening parentheses and check that every beginner has an ender.

Writers who come from language backgrounds that use commas freely often benefit from searching for all the commas in a document. As Microsoft Word highlights each comma, writers (perhaps being used to stringing several independent clauses together) can decide which commas can stay and which need to be revised. Similarly, writers can search for all the periods in a document—they might be surprised at how few or how many the computer finds. Thus, the Find/Replace feature can help writers analyze their writing, an example of using the program in a constructivist manner. Over time, many students find that their common mistakes decrease in number as they become more aware of them and as they correct them individually.

Reviewing: This feature, known in earlier versions of Microsoft Word as Track Changes, makes it easy for a reader to suggest changes in a document and for the writer to see those suggested changes. With a click of a button, a reader can type in changes on a document and see the changed text in a different color. The writer can then either accept or reject the suggested changes; accepted changes blend in seamlessly with the document while the rejected ones simply disappear. Similarly, a reader can make comments (which do not directly affect text in the document), and the writer can delete those as well. This time-saving system is useful for peer review or editing and for teachers who want to show students a piece of writing as well as the suggested changes. In my experience, students appreciate being able to see what they wrote and what changes might be considered, and these exercises often lead to interesting discussions about the many ways that an idea can be presented.

Dawn Bikowski is director of the ESL Composition Program at Ohio University, in the United States, and editor of On CALL, the CALL Interest Section newsletter.
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President’s Message

Presidential Goals

As the first nonnative-English-speaking president in TESOL’s forty-one-year history, I plan to focus on a number of major areas pertinent to TESOL both as an association and as a profession. Here are four goals for my presidential term.

Expand Global Presence

The first goal is to continue to promote TESOL to reach ESL and EFL teachers, teacher educators, and researchers in every corner of the world to ensure that the association is truly a global community. As such, I will support efforts to implement the new TESOL governance model to empower members to take leadership roles in the affiliates, interest sections, caucuses, task forces, committees, and beyond.

In order to make TESOL international, it is necessary to actively expand its global membership. Now that TESOL has global memberships (both individual and electronic) in place, the next step is to devise an international membership development plan. This requires a clear focus on expanding relationships in every corner of the world through affiliates, symposia, and other activities.

Increase Member Benefits

I want all TESOL members to be happy and to believe they are getting the benefits they deserve from their memberships. My second goal is to ensure that all members know the total package of benefits they receive and to encourage members to use those benefits.

Since TESOL serves a diverse membership, it is important to offer a variety of publications, professional development workshops, and interest section discussions, among others. Member satisfaction is also a testimony to what TESOL offers in terms of professional services, ongoing support, and mentoring mechanisms beyond conventions, symposia, academies, journals, and publications. I want to work with the board to find more ways to increase member benefits.
Strengthen Research and Its Practical Applications

The third goal is to strengthen the academic and professional rigor of TESOL’s conventions, symposia, and programs. It is not enough to just report the research. TESOL is perfectly poised to synthesize and disseminate research that can be applied in the classroom. In addition, TESOL shall continue to reach out to other professional organizations and associations to collaborate on research topics of mutual interest.

Many individual TESOL members are conducting different kinds of research and making contributions to their respective fields. TESOL can become the vehicle for sharing this research by developing a comprehensive research database (e.g., TESOL Corpus) through its Web site to benefit all members and engage all the TESOL entities, such as interest sections, affiliates, and caucuses.

Enhance Effective Communication at All Levels

Effective communication is the key to the soundness of any association. As such, I want to encourage and strengthen communication efficiency and effectiveness at all levels, such as between board members and Central Office staff, between board members and TESOL members, between TESOL and other associations, and between TESOL and publishers. It is important to recognize that being a global association means we will encounter and experience diverse opinions, diverse needs, and diverse strategies. This is what makes TESOL dynamic and vital as it embraces and celebrates diversity. I encourage each and every one of you to have a sense of ownership and to communicate your ideas to support your own association—TESOL.

Jun Liu
President, 2006–07
Association News

**TESOL Presents to State Legislative Leaders on Effective Education Policy**
On March 11, 2006, Past President Amy Schlessman (see photo at right) spoke on behalf of TESOL before an audience of one hundred state legislative and business leaders on effective education policy for English language learners. The presentation was part of a conference on immigration sponsored by the State Legislative Leaders Foundation (SLLF), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization established to serve state legislative leaders in the United States.

The conference, “Changing Faces: Helping the States Meet the Challenges of Immigration,” focused on how immigration is affecting states and how states can respond effectively. Conference organizers specifically identified TESOL because of its expertise in serving English language learners, and they invited a TESOL representative to address state legislative leaders on the issue of education policy.


**Download Presentations from TESOL 2005**
TESOL has developed an online repository of convention presentations and materials. Participants were asked to submit their materials and papers by early June 2005. Watch for information on when and how you can access these resources in *TESOL Connections* and at http://www.tesol.org/:

**Professional Development.**

**2006 Symposia**
The TESOL Symposium on Words Matter: The Importance of Vocabulary on English Teaching and Learning took place March 27 at Dubai Men’s College, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The featured speakers were Tom Cobb, Montreal, Canada; Michael McCarthy, Nottingham, United Kingdom; and Ron Carter, Nottingham, United Kingdom. David Palfreyman, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, provided closing remarks.

The TESOL Symposium on English Teacher Development in EFL Contexts will take place November 10 at Shantou University, in Guangdong Province, China.

For more information, contact edprograms@tesol.org.

**2006 TESOL Academies**
TESOL will hold two academies in 2006, one in the United States and the other in Korea. The first 2006 academy will be held at Roosevelt University, in Chicago, Illinois, in the United States, June 23–24, 2006. This academy will feature six hands-on, ten-hour workshops. The TESOL International Summer Academy will be at the Sookmyung Women’s University, in Seoul, Korea. This academy will feature four hands-on, ten-hour workshops.

For more information about TESOL Academies, e-mail edprograms@tesol.org.
2006 Online Courses and Seminars
Learn about online professional development opportunities through TESOL, including the Principles and Practices of Online Teaching Certificate Program and TESOL virtual seminars. TESOL virtual seminars focus on key issues in ESL and EFL. Bring together colleagues at your school or organization for a live Webcast (or, when it fits your schedule, use the virtual seminar’s playback feature). Virtual seminar participants can also take part in an online discussion. For more information, e-mail edprograms@tesol.org.

Results of the Elections for the 2006–07 Board of Directors and Nominating Committee
President-Elect, 2006–07: Sandra J. Briggs
Directors, 2006–09: Joyce Kling, Gabriel Díaz Maggioli, John Schmidt, Jim Stack
New Nominating Committee Members: Khadar Bashir-Ali, Ester de Jong, Lisa Harshbarger, Constantine Ioannou, Ann Johns, Gabriela Kleckova, Susanne McLaughlin, Beth Witt

Board Approves Nonnative Speaker, Adolescent English Language Learner Position Statements
At its meeting in March, the Board of Directors approved two new position statements. The first restates TESOL’s opposition to discrimination in hiring based on native language and expands TESOL’s support for nonnative English speakers in the field. The second position statement, which focuses on adolescent English language learners in the United States, states TESOL’s opposition to the growing practice of encouraging adolescent English language learners to withdraw from high school early in order to boost test scores. Both statements are available on TESOL’s Web site.

Research Agenda
In October 2004, the TESOL Board of Directors approved a revised Research Agenda developed by the Second Research Agenda Task Force, which comprised Simon Borg, Andrew Curtis, Chris Davidson, Zhao Hong Han, Dudley Reynolds, and Tom Scovel (chair). The Research Agenda was created to help TESOL professionals and others organize and coordinate inquiry in the field and to promote broader awareness of what constitutes research in TESOL. Built on the broad, methodologically and topically pluralistic foundation of the first Research Agenda in 2000, this document presents TESOL professionals with priority areas for research and should help funding applicants and agencies decide what research to pursue and support. The 2004 Research Agenda includes a special hot-linked section titled “References, Resources, and Web Sites.”

To download the current agenda, go to http://www.tesol.org/ : Professional Issues : Research Agenda. A version in portable document format (PDF) is available. TESOL welcomes your comments and suggestions as well as your additions to the resources section. Please send them to research@tesol.org.

Call for New Members: TESOL Publications Committee
The Publications Committee seeks applications from members interested in serving on the committee for the March 2007–March 2010 term. The committee acquires and reviews book manuscripts and proposals, and develops publishing plans for books and series that support TESOL’s mission and needs. Committee members identify themes or areas of interest suitable for publication, given TESOL’s mandate, structure, and market position. A description of the work and responsibilities of the committee, as well as a link to the application, is available at http://www.tesol.org : Association : Communities : Standing Committees of TESOL : Publications Standing Committee. Applications are due October 1, 2006.

Call for New Members: TESOL Serial Publications Committee
The TESOL Serial Publications Committee seeks applications from members interested in serving on the committee for the March 2007–March 2010 term. The committee ensures that TESOL’s serial publications maintain the highest professional standards and meet the needs of their readers. A description of the work and responsibilities of the committee, as well as a link to the application, is available at http://www.tesol.org : Association : Communities : Standing Committees of TESOL : Serial Publications Standing Committee. Applications are due October 1, 2006.

TESOL Awards and Grants
The generous contributions of TESOL members make it possible for TESOL to provide sixty awards and grants each year. You can support the Awards and Grants program when you register for TESOL’s Annual Convention and Exhibition, when you renew your membership, or, if you’d like to make your U.S., Canada, and Mexico tax-deductible contribution today, visit http://www.tesol.org/ : Association : Help Support TESOL : Awards and Grants.
E-List Subscriptions Have New Features

The interest section (IS) and caucus e-lists have new features that enable members to manage their own subscriptions. You can now set and change the preferences for your e-list connections, such as changing the e-mail address and setting subscriptions to digest mode.

For these features to take effect, you will need to edit your member profile on the TESOL Web site. If you are currently subscribed to IS and caucus e-lists, you will need to check “Join Your IS or Caucus E-list” in your member profile to remain on your respective e-lists. Note: If you did not edit your member profile by May 1, you were automatically unsubscribed from your e-lists, and you will need to resubscribe.

To use these new features, go to http://www.tesol.org/ : Interest Sections : Connect with Colleagues. If you have any questions or problems, please e-mail interestsections@tesol.org.

Easy Access to E-Newsletter Subscriptions

New or renewing members are now automatically subscribed to their respective interest section or caucus e-newsletters. To manage e-newsletter subscriptions, simply log on to the TESOL Web site at http://www.tesol.org, select Edit Profile, and navigate to the Communication Options tab. You can opt to receive the e-newsletters for all of the interest sections and caucuses you belong to or for none of them.

Improved Member Application

TESOL has changed the way members may transact membership business online. When you join or renew online, all financial transactions are live. You will become an active member immediately after you have completed the transaction, with no more waiting to hear if your payment has been processed.

Using the Forgot Password? Function

If you forget your password or member ID to log in to TESOL's Web site, use the Forgot Password? option under the log-in area on the left side of the home page. If you have any questions or problems, e-mail service@tesol.org.

Annual Fund

Supporting TESOL's work has never been easier. Now you can make your contributions online. Visit the Support TESOL section of the Association page to make your U.S., Canada, and Mexico tax-deductible gift to the association. For more information contact Development Manager Jane Kaddouri at 703-518-2539 or jkaddouri@tesol.org.

Conduct TESOL Business Online

You can join or renew your membership, subscribe to TESOL serial publications, and purchase TESOL publications online. TESOL members get an average discount of 25% on publications.

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TESOL Connections

TESOL Connections is a free semimonthly e-newsletter for members. It includes briefings about TESOL and TESOL members in the mainstream news and hot links to field-related resources. Articles and items and stories by and about members that are posted on the TESOL Web site are highlighted and linked through TESOL Connections. Sign up at http://www.tesol.org/ : Membership : Membership Benefits.

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March 20—24, 2007

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Where will sessions take place?
Washington State Convention Center in Downtown Seattle

What is the theme?
Spanning the Globe: Tides of Change

How do I register?
The Advance Program, which is mailed in early December, 2006 contains a registration form, membership form, hotel reservation form, and tour form, as well as a general overview of the convention. If you are not a member and would like to receive an Advance Program, please e-mail info@tesol.org.

Where do I stay?
Reservations for convention housing will become available in early December 2006. For a list of hotels, prices, and the hotel reservation form, please consult the Advance Program.

Where do I get more information?
TESOL Conference Services Department
700 South Washington Street, Suite 200
Alexandria, Virginia 22314 USA
Tel: 703-836-0774 Fax: 703-836-7864
Email: conventions@tesol.org

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