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A Resource Center for TESOL Educators
A powerful component of becoming an educator is the opportunity for reflection. A great part of this issue is dedicated to educators in various teaching contexts around the world who reflect on topics such as their own professional development in foreign countries or seeing things from the point of view of foreign language learners themselves. Perhaps one of these articles might spark a memory or trigger an epiphany of your own.

- **Communities of Practice:** Judie Haynes suggests how teachers might avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings when conducting parent conferences. Linda New Levine writes about the issue of English language learner (ELL) placement and the often-reluctant mainstream teachers who are forced to work with ESOL teachers. Debbie Zacarian shares an interesting story about trying to make meaningful connections with a few mainstreamed ELLs who come to school for breakfast and lunch but skip the rest of the day. Ke Xu recounts memories of the camaraderie and false starts he and his colleagues shared as they began their English language teaching careers in China. Alvino Fantini continues his discussion of incorporating cultural and cross-cultural classroom activities by using a process approach framework. Dorothy Zemach tackles the delicate subject of cheating, proposing that students often cheat due to an exaggerated fear of failure or loss.

- **Out of the Box:** Ligia López discusses the epiphany she had as a Colombian teacher of Hispanic children from various backgrounds in a mainstream U.S. classroom. Sara White shares a heartrending story that is nominally about considering students’ complex personalities in an attempt to match them with a particular book that will help them develop a love of reading. Cara Preuss ponders the labyrinth of acronyms and initialisms in English language teaching and suggests that short forms of communication can actually impede the messages we try to impart. Kevin McCaughhey describes what it’s like to shift from being a teacher to being a student, recognizing his teacher’s missteps as ones that he has also made.

- **Portal:** Ryuko Kubota responds to an article about “English for dating purposes” and discusses the intricacies and issues involved in searching for cross-cultural, cross-linguistic dating partners. Fang Ying criticizes vocabulary exercises that involve memorization and decontextualized strategies, instead encouraging vocabulary enhancement through story creation. Kathleen Klose facilitates a classroom of multicultural adult students who help each other prepare for successful English interchanges in citizenship classes, college classes, and the everyday life of immigrants. Colby Toussaint Clark and Ian Clark maintain that anecdotal evidence from practitioners suggests that second language acquisition is best supported by the use of clearly structured pair work or small-group tasks.

- **References & Resources:** Jamar Miller reviews a book that focuses on oral communication for natural speech conversation. Grace Willson reviews a digital book with hyperlinks that expose the reader to a world of resources. Azadeh Nemati reports on a starter book that explores the relationships among linguistics, semantics, and pragmatics, and combines theoretical knowledge with real-world examples. Ayanna Cooper takes a look at a Web site for Grades K–8 that offers leveled readers, reader’s theater scripts, fiction, nonfiction, wordless books, and comic books.

- **Compleat Links:** Sharon Switzer writes about the issues that multicultural individuals face as they struggle with the conflict between their school self and home self. Julie Mijangos-Guzzardo comes to grips with the multifaceted issues involved in English language teaching in Mexico and encourages the implementation of national standards to improve the overall quality of instruction. Lora Yasen describes the writing techniques that she uses with her Japanese students that prepare them to spend a month writing a short novella. Cindy McPhail argues that expressive reading can boost reading comprehension when English language learners are able to accurately interpret an author’s meaning. In Grammatically Speaking, Richard Firsten demystifies adverbs of frequency and adverbs of degree, explains the inequality of prefixes, clarifies the use of passive voice, and leaves us with another brain teaser to ponder.

I invite you to share your insights as we venture toward a better understanding of teaching and learning English throughout the world.

Eileen N. Whelan Ariza  et@tesol.org
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President’s Message

What does it mean to be a member of a professional community committed to excellence in teaching English to speakers of other languages? Over the years, I have found that it means many things. Like many of you, I expect TESOL to deliver resources to help me expand my professional knowledge. Whether I am mentoring students, facilitating a teacher training workshop, or presenting a paper on support for heritage languages, it’s very important that the information I communicate be both relevant and engaging to the audience.

If you haven’t had a chance, I highly recommend that you visit the online TESOL Resource Center (TRC), which is where I often turn to find much of that information. Launched in 2007, the TRC is a member benefit that currently houses nearly 200 resources useful for both classroom practice and professional development. In addition, currently posted are video links for the plenary sessions from the 2008 TESOL convention as well as notes from some of the convention presentations.

To make sure that you get access to useful, high-quality resources, TESOL has adopted a number of resource submission standards. The use of templates and guidelines ensures that each resource is adequately detailed and consistent. Submission templates are available for lesson plans, activities, teaching tips, quizzes, and assessments, and there are submission guidelines for papers, articles, presentations, multimedia resources, Web links, and software.

A three-round review process includes the Central Office professional development staff specialist and two TESOL members who are experts in the field. They use the TRC review criteria to record their feedback and to ensure that the resources are clear, appropriate, relevant, and accurate. The reviewers either approve resources as they are or provide helpful feedback to the submitter to make the resource ready for online posting.

With my colleague Nader Ayish, I recently had the opportunity to post a resource titled “The Cultural Heritage Project.” This lesson plan model enables teachers to draw on students’ cultural backgrounds to teach various language skills by utilizing online search engines. Because so many members have taken the time and effort to submit resources such as this, the TRC has become a valuable tool for the TESOL community in helping us meet the professional needs of our members.

Seeing the variety of resources currently posted reminded me of how much I value the diversity of TESOL’s membership. As a community of learners, we empower each other by sharing high-quality professional and classroom resources, which is one of the key ways to connect and have a professional exchange of work and ideas. As the number of resources in the TRC continues to grow, so do the breadth of topics and the value of this benefit.

Please do yourself a favor and check out the TRC for yourself at www.tesol.org/resourcecenter. A detailed article about it can be found in the Association News section of this issue (p. 46). The article provides specific information on navigating the site, locating resources, and submitting new resources.

I hope you take time to visit the TRC to expand your professional knowledge by finding novel and practical resources that suit your needs.

Shelley Wong
President, 2008–2009  tesol@gmu.edu
Mrs. Crain, a third-grade teacher, was conferencing with Akiko’s parents in October. Her concern was Akiko’s lack of progress. She explained that Akiko needed to spend more time completing homework and studying for tests. The parents nodded in apparent agreement. During the weeks after the conference, though, Akiko’s efforts did not improve. Mrs. Crain was at a loss to understand why.

As it turns out, she was unaware of some important cultural differences. In many Asian countries, to nod in agreement means “Yes, I hear you,” not “Yes, I agree.” Mrs. Crain was also unaware that Akiko spent quite a bit of time completing homework from her Japanese Saturday school. Her mother was concerned that if Akiko didn’t keep up with her Japanese studies, she would return to the competitive environment in Japan at a great disadvantage.

General education teachers need to learn how to better communicate with the increasing number of linguistically and culturally diverse families in their schools. Our goal as ESL teachers should be to help our colleagues hold productive conferences with the parents of English language learners. To do this, these teachers should try to learn something about the culture of the families with whom they are conferencing.

Conferences with parents from other cultures require additional preparation. In this article I offer guidelines for ESL teachers to use with classroom and subject area teachers in their schools.

**Conference preplanning.** Contact a translator for parents who need one. This is extremely important. Many parents do not speak English well enough to understand what the teacher is saying. A parent once told me that when she first came to the United States, she faked her way through her child’s conferences without understanding a word. If your school does not provide translators, ask parents to bring a bilingual family member.

Siblings or, worse yet, the child who is the subject of the conference should not translate for the parents.

Plan in advance how you are going to conference. If there is no translator, speak in short, simple sentences. Refrain from using educational jargon.

**Visuals,** like work samples, are more powerful than the words you speak. Try to have report cards and rubrics translated. I once sat in a conference with a kindergarten teacher who illustrated the problems the child was having in math by using the math manipulatives from her classroom.

Try to schedule your conferences so that both parents can attend. In some cultures, the father must be included because no important decisions are made without his agreement.

Parents from many cultures have unrealistic expectations for their children. If their children were good students in their home countries, parents may push them to work on grade level in English in a relatively short time. General education teachers should be able to explain the difference between academic and social language. They should be able to talk about how long it takes children to work on grade level in English. They should know why they should encourage parents to speak their native language at home. This must all be part of professional development programs presented in advance of the conference.

There are cultural differences in the use of space, so consider the physical setup of your conference space. A direct face-to-face setting may be too confrontational or intimate for parents from some cultures. Think about arranging chairs so that your body is at a 45-degree angle to the parents.

**Greeting parents.** Although many people from other cultures have adopted the Western manner of shaking hands, this may not be the case with all cultures. It is often more appropriate to bow lightly. Be sure to use names and title when addressing adults. Children are often referred to as “child” or “boy” or “girl.” If you are unsure how to address someone, ask. This is especially important in Asian countries, where rank is important.

**Note:** Conference preplanning can save the day! The ESL teacher in this article was prepared and so was the family. This is not always the case. It is not uncommon for ESL teachers to attend conferences after teachers from other schools to attend conferences, and to find themselves unprepared for the conversation. The ESL teacher, however, had prepared herself for the family’s cultural needs.
hands, in some cultures this manner of greeting is not the norm. Asian women, for example, generally do not shake hands. It is more comfortable for them to nod and bow slightly when introduced. Teachers need to know what the norms are for the cultures of their students. It is also wise to find out how names are used in different cultures. If necessary, ask parents what you should call them.

Pay attention to your body language. Smile and present a friendly demeanor. Crossing your arms in front of you may send the wrong message.

Avoiding cultural misunderstandings. In the United States, verbal communication is usually direct and there is little need for nonverbal cues in order for us to understand each other. We live in a low-context culture; the conventions for communication are not written down, and we assume that everyone knows them. When families from diverse cultures come into our schools, they don’t know our hidden rules. Most of these immigrant families come from high-context cultures; they do not like disharmony and will, like the parents in Mrs. Crain’s conference, often avoid expressing a clear “no.” I know of many incidences when parents have moved their children to a different school rather than express their disagreement with a school.

Saving face, or avoiding shame or embarrassment, is crucial in high-context cultures. That doesn’t mean that people from the United States never attempt to save face, but it is much less important in low-context cultures. Parents may experience a loss of face if teachers are opposing an important cultural value or making them feel personally inadequate. And parents may experience shame or disgrace if they believe that they are making a concession unwillingly. Some parents will do all that they can to evade situations where overt disagreements occur. We as teachers often feel that there is agreement because parents do not voice disagreement. What we have to keep in mind while conferencing is that parents are focused on building group harmony, whereas we may just want to solve problems and move on.

Another area for misunderstanding is in different cultures’ attitudes toward time. People from the United States tend to see time as being highly structured, logical, exact, and sequential. Lateness is considered rude. People from many other cultures, however, like to keep their time unstructured. If a parent arrives at a conference 45 minutes after the appointed time, he or she is not necessarily trying to be rude; rather, it may be because arriving up to 45 minutes after the designated time is not considered late.

Our goal as ESL teachers should be to ensure that English language learners have a positive educational experience. Establishing positive relationships with the parents of our students furthers this goal. So we need to learn about the cultures of our students and apply that knowledge to our communications with parents.

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HOME ROOM

Out of the Corner

by Linda New Levine

Nina and Lisa were best friends. They taught second grade side by side in our 100-year-old school building. Their classrooms were enormous, with large sliding doors that allowed them to combine their two classes into one large group. Throughout the day, their students intermingled as Nina and Lisa co-taught the lessons that they had planned during the long, ambling walks they enjoyed at the end of the school day.

For some reason, Nina and Lisa had never had English language learners (ELLs) placed in their classrooms; ELLs were usually placed in the classrooms of the newer and less experienced teachers. But as our town began to attract more immigrant workers, the numbers of ELLs increased and soon most teachers in our school had several language learners in their classes—even Nina and Lisa. They were not pleased.

One afternoon, they went to talk to Jim about the problem of ELL placement. As a principal, Jim was old-school but well respected in the community. His fellow administrators didn’t think he was as capable as they were, but the teachers in his building liked him and flourished under his supervision, which was at times described as benign neglect.

Nina was one of Jim’s favorites. They had worked together for a long time. Nina generally got what she

The first-grade teachers were talking about whole language and borrowing big books from the ESL collection.
wanted from Jim, but not this time. Jim wouldn’t remove the ELLs from Nina’s and Lisa’s classrooms. The policy in the district was to spread them evenly throughout the grade. In that way, the children received more language input from English-speaking friends. It was thought that this English immersion would speed the children’s language acquisition.

“What I’m doing doesn’t work with these kids,” Nina explained. “And I can’t take time to work with them and let the other kids suffer.”

“You and Lisa are right next door to each other,” Jim reminded her. “That should make it easy for you to group the ELLs from both classes for math, science, and social studies.”

“What about reading?” Lisa asked. “How can I handle another reading group?”

“I’m sending the ESL teacher into Nina’s room every day to teach reading and language to the ELLs,” Jim explained.

At that, Nina walked out of the office, slamming the door behind her. Soon everyone in the building knew that Nina and Lisa were forced to accept the ESL teacher into a corner of their classroom to teach reading. The two of them didn’t hesitate to complain about the intrusion to the entire staff. People started taking sides, and few were taking the ESL teacher’s side.

I was that ESL teacher.

A week later, I set up my table, chairs, and materials while Nina and Lisa were out walking. I was trying to avoid a confrontation, but it was inevitable. On my first day in her room, Nina told me that she didn’t want me there, and I told her that I didn’t want to be there either. I had my own classroom and could have pulled the ELLs out for reading instruction. Why was Jim causing all of these problems?

That year I had learned about whole language reading instruction at a TESOL convention. I began to purchase big books and learn more about whole language literacy through reading and discussions with colleagues from other schools. No one in my school had used big books or knew about whole language.

In spite of the discord in the second-grade classroom, I was excited and happy about the direction my reading instruction was taking. I saw that the children responded with excitement to the big books, the colorful pictures, and the many language activities that propelled their literacy development. Soon my second graders were reading many books and even writing their own versions of the big book stories. I displayed these stories in the ESL corner of Nina’s room. Nina’s and Lisa’s other students often wandered into our corner during class to listen to the stories from the big books. Nina and Lisa began to notice that the ESL corner was attracting more and more of their students away from the workbook pages that formed the basis of the second-grade reading program. They also noted that the first-grade teachers were talking about whole language and borrowing big books from the ESL collection.

Conversations in the lunch room veered away from complaints about unruly youngsters to discussions about reading instruction. The younger teachers in the school were more knowledgeable about this new method than their experienced colleagues and more eager to experiment with new techniques. Jim wandered in and smiled, pretending not to notice the discussions.

By the following summer, Jim had found money to support staff development in our school for whole language reading instruction. All of the kindergarten through second-grade teachers participated. Lisa and Nina signed up last—when they discovered that they were the only teachers who had not yet done so. The summer workshops were exciting for all of us. We rarely had an opportunity to talk about instructional strategies during the school year. We enjoyed the relaxed nature of the training and the fact that the trainers were teachers from a neighboring school district who had gone through a similar learning process the year before. They didn’t know all of the answers to our questions, but they encouraged us to experiment in our classrooms to develop strategies that would work with our students. By September, all of us were working with whole language reading, each in our own way.

As I recall those difficult and exciting days, I have a renewed respect for Jim. He took a big risk by challenging Nina and Lisa and a big risk in trusting an inexperienced ESL teacher. But in the end it paid off in renewed professional development for the staff and improvement in reading instruction for all students in the building. And I finally got out of the corner in Nina’s classroom.
Hevy came to his high school in time for breakfast. His school served a free or reduced breakfast and lunch to those whose family’s income qualified them to receive a free meal.

“Hey, Jorge. How’s it goin’?” he asked his friend as they both sat down to eat. When the school bell rang, they finished their meal, walked quietly out of the building, and went to Hevy’s apartment. At exactly 11:30, they returned to school, listened for the bell, walked to the cafeteria, ate lunch, and once again snuck out of the school and back to Hevy’s apartment. Skipping school had become close to a daily ritual for them.

The school had a policy of contacting the parents or guardians of students who had missed more than a day of school. A voicemail message was left, and a letter was sent home. In addition, students who missed more than 4 days were contacted by the school personnel. Hevy and Jorge were members of the second category. They were also aware of the school’s policies and made sure to erase the voicemail messages and destroy the letters that were sent home. Their parents were unaware that the boys were skipping and failing school. Although they may have suspected as much, the parents worked more than 12 hours a day and assumed that their children were responsible.

At midterm during the first semester, the district’s elementary, middle, and high school ESL staff met during one of the school’s teacher work days. While the group was readying to meet, Haley, one of the middle school teachers, asked how her students were doing now that they had moved on to the high school. The high school ESL staff responded about the progress of several of her former students.

“How about Hevy, Maria, Dimitri, and Jorge?” Karl, one of the elementary ESL teachers asked. “They were so hard working.”

The high school staff members thought for a minute. They responded that they didn’t have any students with these names. Almost in unison, they said that they didn’t work with or know the students who had exited the ESL program.

“If you worked with them during elementary school and they became proficient in English, we wouldn’t really have the opportunity to work with or know them,” one of the teachers said.

“Give me their first and last names, and I will check and let you know how they are doing,” another responded.

When the high school ESL teacher returned to her school, she checked on the students that her colleague had asked about. Hevy and Jorge, she found, had missed 21 out of 40 days! She also learned that the guidance counselor had made several unsuccessful attempts to keep them in school.

“I have met with them several times,” the guidance counselor told her. “They listen politely, promise me that they will return to school, and do return in a short spurt of steady attendance. Then they resume skipping school. Their teachers and I don’t know them well. Hevy and Jorge don’t seem connected here. They aren’t participating in class or afterschool activities. We continue to seek ways to help them return to and stay in school, and we see them sneaking into breakfast and lunch. We try to keep them in school, but they

The guidance counselor had made several unsuccessful attempts to keep them in school
Shortly before the 2008 TESOL convention in New York, a friend of mine on the TESOL Board asked me to give some tips to new TESOL members who had just entered the field of EFL, which I did with pleasure because it reminded me of when I worked in China as an EFL professional.

In the early 1980s, upon graduation from Jiangsu Teachers’ College, I was assigned to work as an EFL program coordinator in the Education Department of Jiangsu Province. I was young, ambitious, proud, yet nervously aware of my lack of teaching experience. To help me gain the teaching experience required for the job, the department sent me to teach English in a middle school in Nanjing. I taught three different classes at three different levels each semester so that I could become familiar with the curriculum and methodology used at each of the six grade levels.

I was young, ambitious, proud, yet nervously aware of my lack of teaching experience.

“Hevy and Jorge?” Karl asked. They turned around, stood up, and, in front of everyone in the cafeteria, hugged Karl. What made the moment particularly special was that the two boys had grown over a head taller than Karl, and they both had to lean over to hug him. During the rest of the lunch period, they sat in the cafeteria and spoke with their beloved elementary ESL teacher.

Within a few short weeks, both Hevy and Jorge began attending school regularly. Two to three days a week, after school, they took a bus to the elementary school, where they met with Karl. The high school staff were amazed at the elementary teacher’s ability to get these students back on track; it was the power of the long relationship that Karl had built with them that made it possible.

Key to this turnaround was the principle of **joinfostering:** “an organization and implementation of social practices to enable students who speak a language other than English to join in and participate in all aspects of English-medium classroom life” (Faltis, 2001, p. 1). Students who are learning English build connected relationships with their ESL teachers that often span years. Seeking ways to maintain these relationships can be a powerful mechanism for building the active participation that all teachers seek.

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“Key to this turnaround was the principle of **joinfostering:** “an organization and implementation of social practices to enable students who speak a language other than English to join in and participate in all aspects of English-medium classroom life” (Faltis, 2001, p. 1). Students who are learning English build connected relationships with their ESL teachers that often span years. Seeking ways to maintain these relationships can be a powerful mechanism for building the active participation that all teachers seek.”

Reference

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who taught at the same level met regularly to collaborate on their lesson plans, read articles, share experiences in teaching, discuss issues of common concern, and find solutions to the problems they identified. Teachers also regularly attended workshops such as the Best Practice Showcases hosted by the Nanjing City Bureau of Education and the Nanjing City College of Teacher Education. Many teachers also listened to the radio broadcast of English teaching programs offered by Radio Nanjing, which helped them prepare their lessons. I personally found the broadcast very helpful because it offered practical assistance to teachers.

Unfortunately, China’s educational system then was still very centralized. Schools across the country were using the same set of textbooks, following the same curriculum guidelines, offering the same amount of instruction hours, and moving forward at the same pace. (Five years later, when I read about the military model of educational administration in a course I took at Melbourne University, in Australia, I thought of China’s system right away.) The dominant teaching model was book based, teacher centered, and test driven. The teaching moved so fast, and there was so much content to cover, that teachers had barely any time left to reflect on their teaching.

I spent several weekends in the school library searching for storybooks, comic books, magazines, newspapers, and cassettes for my students. I was the first teacher in the school to use imported textbooks and audiocassette recording in the classroom, and the first to conduct a class in the language lab. I also organized the school’s first English conversation club for students, which met once a week. Six months after I started this job, I moved to live on campus so that I could spend more time with my students, especially those who lived on campus. I lived in an old building that was waiting to be demolished; my room was a big classroom with holes and cracks in the roof and in the walls. Without a heater or even a stove, it was freezing in winter. When it was too cold, I would fill a bucket with hot water from the school kitchen and wrap my arms around it to keep myself warm while grading students’ work or preparing lessons. Yet I didn’t complain about it. In fact, compared with my overheated apartment in New York City, I would rather stay in that room if I could choose now, because the cold, refreshing air kept my mind working.

It was during this period that I read many books and did a lot of thinking about teaching methodology and pedagogy. I made the best use of my large room, which soon became a multipurpose activity room that housed a space for my students’ reading club and conversation club in rainy weather, an office and newsroom for the editors and reporters from the school’s English newsletter, and even a rehearsal room for the school’s English drama team.

In addition to the heavy teaching load, I also worked as a student supervisor and counselor of one of the classes I taught. This was actually required of every new teacher in China. If a student cut two to three classes in a month, I would visit that student’s parents, find out what happened, and get the parents involved in helping the student. I actually benefited from these visits as well because they helped me understand my students.

My hard work paid off. By the end of the 2-year internship as originally planned by the Education Department, the school asked the Director General for a favor: to “borrow” me for another year. The request was approved, and the total of 3 years I spent teaching at six different levels laid a solid foundation for my future career as a teacher and researcher in the field of EFL. I will discuss this topic further in my next column.

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Previously in this column, I made the case for expanding the goal of ESOL to include the development of intercultural competence (see “Expanding the Goal of ESOL,” Essential Teacher, March 2008) and presented a model for course redesign to help further this goal (see “Redesigning ESOL Courses to Address Cultural and Intercultural Aspects,” Essential Teacher, June 2008). This column follows up with frameworks and activities to aid in implementing cultural and intercultural exploration in an expanded course design.

ESL and EFL contexts present different possibilities for cultural exploration. In the ESL context, learners are immersed in an English-speaking milieu and classroom work is naturally bolstered by continuing exposure to English, even after classes are over. In the EFL context, however, English is often limited to the classroom itself, with fewer opportunities for real-life exposure. Nonetheless, in both situations cultural and cross-cultural exploration is essential for furthering students’ development of intercultural competence.

The process approach framework (A. E. Fantini, 1999) can help ensure inclusion of cultural and cross-cultural activities in the classroom. This framework posits seven stages to guide lesson plan development:

1. Presentation of new material
2. Practice in context
3. Grammar exploration
4. Transposition (or use)
5. Sociolinguistic exploration
6. Target culture exploration
7. Intercultural exploration

Whereas most teachers are familiar with Stages 1–4, the latter stages are less common. But including these three additional stages ensures that language exploration is complemented by explicit attention to sociolinguistic, cultural, and intercultural aspects. Textbooks generally focus on language structure and, increasingly, communication (Stages 1–4), but pay little attention to Stages 5–7, and teachers must often develop such activities on their own (or not).

This model establishes an explicit process that clarifies objectives and activities that are appropriate for each of the seven stages of a lesson. It also helps teachers select, sequence, and evaluate learning and teaching activities that are chosen because of their match with learning objectives. Most important, when developing the course syllabus and lesson plans, teachers are reminded that Stage 5–7 activities form part of each lesson cycle. Of course, not all stages may be covered in a single lesson; rather, together they may form a unit of material in which the cycle from Stages 1 to 7 is completed before going on to present new material. In the end, what remains important is that language, cultural, and cross-cultural exploration are integral parts of each unit and together enhance development of intercultural competence.

A second framework that aids in cultural and cross-cultural exploration addresses relationships among artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts (ASM; B. Fantini & Fantini, 1997), a model adopted by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages as part of the National Standards for Foreign Languages. Based on a sociological concept, this framework interrelates three cultural dimensions: artifacts (things people make), sociofacts (how people come together and for what purpose), and mentifacts (what people think or believe). This scheme reminds us that whatever dimension one begins with, the other two are also present and available, and their exploration helps deepen understanding of the target language–culture paradigm.

For example, if we consider any object or item—say, a sandwich—we can investigate, first of all, what a sandwich is (e.g., lunch, snack, bread and cold cuts); then what types of people use a sandwich, and how (e.g., working people, students, for picnics, bite size to accompany cocktails); and finally, what the notion of sandwich represents or means (e.g., portable, inexpensive, quick, common fare). This exploration goes beyond merely considering cultural items; it encourages the consideration of their social uses and significance. In addition, comparing the artifacts, sociofacts, and mentifacts of host culture items with those of the learners’ cultures (e.g., sandwiches with tacos or rice balls) permits cross-cultural investigation.
Many varied, interesting, and exciting activities exist to help address the cultural and cross-cultural aspects of language. Some have been developed within the intercultural field yet fit nicely into Stages 5–7. For example, *New Ways in Teaching Culture* (A. E. Fantini, 1997) contains 50 activities selected from submissions sent by educators from around the world and grouped according to their focus on sociolinguistic, cultural, or intercultural exploration.

Of the many possibilities, I will describe one class of techniques—operation—which are essentially ordinary activities from everyday life that reveal cultural information. One example is how to prepare a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, something that every young (and even older) American is familiar with.

Have students sit in a semicircle so that they can all witness the operation and provide some background or context for the event. Then, using real props, make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, explaining the process one step at the time. After completing the operation, ask students to recount what they experienced and to narrate the precise steps in sequence. Then have the class give instructions to a volunteer for making a second sandwich. When completed, students can taste small pieces of the sandwich and comment on their reactions. Cross-cultural exploration can be accomplished by then having students discuss comparable snacks in their own cultures. Innumerable operations and variations are possible as follow-up activities.

Helping students develop intercultural competence is not only fun, it is also essential. Frameworks like the process approach and ASM models can help teachers develop lesson plans that include activities that explore cultural and cross-cultural aspects of English. These activities add new dimensions to the traditional language class while helping students develop the knowledge, attitude, skills, and awareness that will foster development of the competence they need for English-speaking contexts.

### References


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A lion and a cheetah decided to have a race. The cheetah was faster, but the lion ended up winning. How? I solicit guesses from the class. Invariably, a student suggests that the lion must have cheated, which gives me my opening: “Oh, no, because you see—winners never cheat, and cheetahs never win.”

We could do a lot with that joke. We could work on pronunciation (*cheater*/*cheetah*) or discuss what it teaches us about a form of humor (manipulating a few words of a common phrase), but I prefer to use it as the opening of a discussion on cheating. Is it true that winners never cheat? Is it true that cheaters never win?

Students are usually quick to conclude that the saying is false (and here’s a good opportunity to slip in a lesson on supporting your opinions with concrete examples) and move on to discuss why people cheat and why (or whether) doing so is bad. If you have low-level students who won’t be able to follow the lion/cheetah opener, start by asking them to list different ways one could cheat on a test. This is a good exercise for any level, actually, because once they’ve shared the methods they know, they’ll be too embarrassed to try them in your class or you’ll at least know what to watch out for!

Most classes eventually consolidate the reasons for cheating into two categories:

1. The cheater feels unequal to the task.
2. The cheater doesn’t respect the assignment.

I think the first is more common. Tests and major assignments induce fear. Even students who are well prepared worry about their performance, and for university students there are obvious consequences to not doing well: a lowered grade; then a lowered
grade point average; then the loss of opportunity to enter graduate school, land a good job, and live happily ever after. This last point is exaggerated, but the perception is there nevertheless.

The best way to combat this form of cheating is to sufficiently prepare students. Far better that you limit your syllabus and teach a moderate amount solidly than cover too much too quickly. Additionally, teachers sometimes feel pressure to be entertaining and fresh at the expense of reviewing material thoroughly enough. It’s OK for students to be a little bored sometimes if that means they’ve truly mastered your teaching point.

However, you also need to admit that you can’t force students to learn. Although you can—and must—provide every opportunity for students to learn and practice, there comes a time when you have to acknowledge their role in taking responsibility for mastering the material. ESL classes are typically smaller than other university classes, and we ESL teachers get to know our students well. It’s hard to classes, and we ESL teachers get to know our students well. It’s OK for students to be a little bored sometimes if that means they’ve truly mastered your teaching point.

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The second form of cheating is trickier to address. Your best defense is transparency. Be crystal clear in your explanations about why you have given a particular assignment and what its value is. Explain why you are teaching a particular point and what you hope to show students by assessing their understanding. Again, though, not all students will accept your explanations. It’s partly age, I think. Come on, show of hands: Did any of you ever cheat in high school or university? I thought so. And was it ever, perhaps, not because you hated learning or didn’t understand the assignment, but just, well, because you could?

It’s like a challenge to The System, which—because it is set up to be authoritarian and controlling—almost begs some clever students to circumvent it. You can’t cause your students to age any faster. But you can help them recognize whether they’re tempted by this type of cheating and then discuss the consequences.

Regarding the consequences, we want students to believe that cheaters “only cheat themselves” and that the true punishment to dodging the assignment is missing the knowledge. Therefore, make that true in your class by placing less emphasis on punishment and demonstrating what learners could do with the skills being offered and what they’d be missing if they didn’t acquire these skills.

I’ll finish with the incident from my youth that led me to this conclusion. My high school German teacher was a wonderful man who loved languages. He spoke 17 languages fluently, but this made it hard for him to understand students who were only there because they had to take 2 years of some language to graduate. He was, to put it mildly, overly trusting. His room was never locked, and he would actually leave the classroom during tests.

During my second year, I stole the test booklet off his desk, photocopied it, and returned it. (Sorry, Mr. Cernick!) It became my job, before each test, to fill out the tests as if they were worksheets and make copies for my friends. I would make different plausible mistakes on each friend’s copy—enough so that our papers were different but we all got an A. Then we’d bring the completed tests into class with us and swap them with the blank tests when he wasn’t looking.

In the spring, the teacher announced that he had registered us all to take a national high school German proficiency exam. Although my friends did poorly on the exam, I scored in the 90th percentile. Filling out the tests and choosing the “mistakes” had actually taught me quite a bit of German—not in the same way that my teacher had intended, but at that moment I realized how pleased I was to have learned some German. This realization changed me, and I can honestly say I never cheated in college, even though I attended one that frequently gave closed-book, unmonitored take-home exams.

I encourage you therefore to spend less time trying to prevent cheating (and much less time beating yourself up if someone manages to cheat) and more time preparing students for their tasks, pointing out the value of what they’re learning and helping them understand the broader value of being in school and gaining an education. But I’d still advise you to lock your office and stay in the room while your students take tests.

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An Autoethnographic Reflection of a Language Teacher in the Making

When I left after 3 years of teaching ESL in a public elementary school in the United States, I wrote a letter to my colleagues to raise their awareness on issues of language, family, injustice, and race. I wrote the message hoping that, through my experience, they would transform their thinking toward English language learners (ELLs) and immigrant children. In the last staff meeting before my departure, I did not have the courage to read my letter out loud; a tight knot in my throat would not allow me to do so. I hope they found the letter in their school mailboxes and read it. I hope the message still resonates.

Adjusting to a New Context

Before I taught in the United States, I had been teaching in Colombia. In May 2004, when I flew to Bogotá to request a U.S. visa, my fourth-grade students in Colombia united in faith and prayed that it would be denied so that I could stay with them. But I received my visa and moved to the United States to begin teaching. I had learned much from my Colombian students, but the lessons I learned from “those Hispanic” students in the United States are joyful, innumerable, and invaluable.

Yes, “those Hispanic children” who are just learning English or “don’t know any English,” who are blamed for “messing up the test scores of the classrooms,” who are mischievous once in a while and get suspended, who cannot spell the high-frequency words, whose parents never show up at conferences or school events, and who eat tamales and smell like chiles. Those “Spanish people,” “Mexicans,” “Hispanics,” or whatever they are called, were now “my children”—my students who ignited in me a passion for lifelong learning (as the school mission says) by opening my eyes to seeing how incomplete I was as a language educator and as a human being.

Nowhere in the elite Colombian education context where I had worked and where my teacher identity had started emerging would I have realized the pain, injustice, and inequity that live within the mainstream. In the United States, Julio, Ely, Oriana, Alondra, Hector, and Leslie, like all of my students, taught me that teaching ESL is more than language teaching. It is about teaching values, fine motor skills, imagination, science, social studies, the brain, tolerance, identity, critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1994)—teaching about life and for life. At many points during my ESL teaching experience, I wondered why children were called limited English proficient when it would be more accurate to refer to them as having limited life experience—or so I thought.

Learning From Students

One second grader whom I taught, Alondra, almost failed her reading running record test because she could not answer a “making connections” question from a storybook about an animated snow truck that got stuck. It was not the language that constrained Alondra’s answer; she just had limited experience with snow and was unable to relate a personal life event in order to earn the necessary points to pass the test. But when it was time to sequence and follow steps in a process, Alondra could make connections easily and teach me how to prepare arroz con leche and even write the recipe.

It felt wonderful to be able to draw from my students’ rich life experiences later on, like when I learned about the traditional Dia de los Muertos and its cultural and social significance. It was so rewarding to see a bunch of Mexicanitos beaming in surprise that Ms. López didn’t know anything about this holiday, not even the concept that a flower path needs to be made so that infant souls can find their homes.

I remember when I realized that Naguatl was the language that many...
of my students’ parents spoke at home. It was the reason why most of them could not read either the English field trip permission slips that were sent home or their Spanish translations in which I had put so much effort and time.

Leslie could differentiate between the words girl and boy even though the sketch she drew, and insisted was a /hirl/, was in my relatively sexist and traditional eyes a boy. “Es una /hirl/ con pants y pelo corto, Ms. López.” Certainly—it was a girl who resembled her with short hair and pants. Leslie also taught me about creatures that live in the Sonora desert, the nocturnal ones that strategize to hunt and survive, just like she did as she hid in a cuevita (cave) when her grandma tried to chase away dangerous beasts to protect her. It was a “long journey through the dessert,” she wrote in a personal account in Spanish with some emerging words in English. Through Leslie’s writing, I learned about all the possible means of transportation between Acapulco and Texas, about aspirations, and about welfare.

My students experienced the power that comes from feeling that they could educate the teacher about their cultures, histories, and identities, which are often ignored and undervalued. My students experienced the power that comes from feeling that they could educate the teacher about their cultures, histories, and identities, which are often ignored and undervalued. It was painful to realize how limited I was, and still am, in knowing about these kids’ experiences and how long I had ignored it, thinking they had only limited life experience.

Besides being a translator, interpreter, graphic designer, painter, dancer, choreographer, and driver (because I took students on my own ESL field trips and to dance performances on weekends and in the evenings), I also turned into a social worker, psychologist, marriage counselor, and even lawyer. There is no doubt that I am deeply indebted to my students and their families for leading me to stretch my psyche, as I imagined a fairer and more just school and reality for them and for me.

The Silver Lining of a Painful Experience

Teaching in the United States and serving this linguistically and racially marginalized population has been a painful experience. But pain is necessary to start transformation, to feel the need to act, and to build a better and fairer society. I am more human now than before I came here. I am aware of and value the multiplicity of languages and identities—even within the Latino community—that one brings to human interaction. I can see the multidimensionality of experiences that are intertwined in a language classroom. I can see life
and the Hispanic experience as plural, and I enjoy that plurality. I have learned to become more tolerant of ambiguity and to ask why before I make conclusions or pass judgments on my students’ lives.

I am more critical and I value life experience and education more than ever, and it is all because of my students and their families. I hope that education grants these children the opportunity to read the word and the world (Freire, 2005) so that they can project their voices and advocate for themselves and their parents, as some of my fourth graders already do when they indicate to their parents who are illiterate in both English and Spanish where they should sign when they receive their food stamps.

Listening to stories of suffering and abuse that desperate mothers like Jennifer’s told, after the children were absent from school for 4 days because they were sleeping on the streets, left me with a bitter taste of injustice and the need to denounce such atrocities. Making arrangements for the family to book a space at a nearby women’s shelter was not enough. I had to imagine, and they know whether we believe in them or not.

I know this is cliché, but we are more similar than we are different (Kubota & Lin, 2006). And the differences? Let’s recognize and value them, not only in words, but in our souls and our genuine actions. Children can read us better than we can ever imagine, and they know whether we believe in them or not.

I know this is cliché, but we are more similar than we are different (Kubota & Lin, 2006). And the differences? Let’s recognize and value them, not only in words, but in our souls and in our genuine actions. Let’s accept the opportunity to be diverse in epistemologies, perspectives, and languages. Let’s give ourselves the opportunity to be educated by our students. As Greene (1995) says, let’s release our imagination and allow our students to lead us to unexplored paths, where we all truly learn in plural, sociocultural discourses. Let’s truly believe that we can touch the skies, spread our wings, and fly.

Romanticizing teaching and thinking of educating as a matter of simple methods was no longer the paradigm.

References

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Feng didn't want to be in my class. He had just arrived from China with English language test scores that showed he was not quite ready for his graduate program without ESL support. Sure, he was courteous and mature enough to comply, but he felt that my class was unnecessary. So that is how we started our semester together—Feng acquiescent but unenthusiastic, and me wondering how to not only teach my students English, but also help them learn to love it.

Of Beliefs and Visions

Since my earliest days as an educator, I have believed that getting caught up in a great story can overcome any barriers of language and disinterest a student might present. Not only do higher level thoughts and responses come more effortlessly from readers of books, but also linguistic study can be more appealing to readers when coupled with literature (Long, 1986).

So as a teacher I picture myself fishing on an ocean sparkling with possibility, with the hope that I can draw students into language development through the enjoyment of literature. I bait my hooks with stories, trying to pair students with books that will grab hold of them—understanding that, for some, these might be the only novels they will ever read in English.

I began my search for the right book with Hsiu-hao, a Taiwanese student in Shenandoah University’s ESL Certificate Program who had a hunger for vocabulary. At the beginning of the semester, his word lists were as long as his study hours. I had never met, much less taught, such a motivated student! Still, I wanted him to embrace the idea that learning words in isolation is not nearly as effective as building vocabulary through context (Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1985).

Hsiu-hao was not convinced of this until I handed him *The Giver*, by Lois Lowry (1993). After the first two chapters he confided in me, “I know I should be looking up all the vocabulary I don’t know, but I just want to keep reading!”

“It’s OK,” I told him, smiling inside. “Just read and enjoy.”

When he came to the end, he was actually disappointed that the story was over. I said, “Guess what? There are two more books by Lowry with the same characters.”

“Really?” he asked. “Can I borrow one to read over the winter break?”

This time my smile broke through to the outside.

Matching Novels to Students

Because links to their own culture aid ESL students in crossing over to English (Post & Rathet, 1996), I often try to pick novels that will speak to students from a background that they can understand. For Karla, a cellist from the Dominican Republic, I chose *I, Juan de Pareja* (de Trevino, 1965), the painfully beautiful Newbery winner about a Black artist who was the slave of the famous painter Velasquez. Because Karla is a musician, I knew that a book about the arts would lure her. And because the story is set in Spain, I hoped that the connections to her Spanish heritage would engage her. But Karla’s difficulties involved more than just learning another language.

Karla was a courageous single mother who moved away from her home country.

I often try to pick novels that will speak to students from a background that they can understand.
to work toward her music education degree. Between playing in the symphony, taking care of her young daughter, and working as a caterer, reading for my course was understandably low on her list of priorities. But even if she hadn’t fully finished the assignments, I could always count on Karla to generate strong class discussions. She never hesitated to share her opinions. Yet I was taken by surprise one day when she walked through the classroom door and enveloped me in a hug.

“No, Karla,” I thought. “It was not me. The story itself has cast its spell, and now you will be under its thrall for your whole life.” This was fishing at its best.

Jing was not as easy a catch as Karla or Hsiu-hao. She was like a tiny red snapper flopping at the end of my line. Her father was afraid that she would not be accepted into our program, so he hurriedly put her on a plane. No one was expecting her. After flying all night from China, Jing was deposited from a taxi onto our campus at 4 a.m. She cried through the Test of English as a Foreign Language that day, unable to speak enough English to communicate her culture shock.

This 18-year-old was the essence of unpredictability. When the faculty took the international students to Washington, DC, Jing left the group and hopped on a bus by herself. Fortunately, they were able to find her again soon after. Some days she would bring me gifts and tell me that I was a wonderful teacher. Other days she came in angry that she was not progressing as fast as the other students, demanding to transfer to somewhere else. At times I found myself wishing that I could let this little fish go swim in another school.

Most of the books I tried with Jing failed to reel her in, and toward the end of the semester I handed her *The Mouse and the Motorcycle* (Cleary, 1965) with little hope. But somehow Jing identified with “that mouse” and began to really read. After that story, she told me she was ready for a new start and that next semester would be better. So I found that Jing was a keeper after all.

For different reasons, I wasn’t sure what novel to choose for Feng. He was not difficult like Jing, outspoken like Karla, or eager like Hsiu-hao. Feng seemed pragmatic in his approach to life. In his native China, he had earned a degree in computer science, not out of passion for it but because he had felt that it would be a solid career. Yet there was a depth to Feng that I was hoping to plumb in English class through exposing him to literature.

Finally, I chose Hemingway’s (1952) *The Old Man and the Sea*, in which an ancient fisherman struggles for days to master the huge fish at the end of his line. Eventually he conquers his prey, but he must tie it to his boat because it is too big to haul aboard. The old man then battles sharks that eat all the meat off the bones of his great catch, leaving nothing for his efforts except the display of perseverance and courage. I hoped that this gritty novel would appeal to Feng’s underlying thoughtfulness and strong work ethic. It did.

For their final project, my students must compose and present a book review. I allow them several drafts, to be reviewed by me or someone at our university Writing Center if they need help with their editing. I will never forget the day Feng brought his paper about *The Old Man and the Sea* to me for my first look.

“The old man said in the book, ‘Man is not made for defeat; man can be destroyed but not defeated,’” Feng read, two-thirds into his essay. “Undeniably, everyone has defects. When someone strives to defeat his weakness that he has already realized, then it is not important whether or not he remains the full fish or the skeleton in the end, because the value of life has already been embodied by the process of pursuit.”
Feng reached the final sentence of his paper: “Hemingway is a hero in the spirit of the world, and he is considered as the real old man who is fishing in our hearts all the time.” I was dumbstruck.

“Feng,” I said, after a long pause. “You have learned English well enough to really discuss your thoughts. And now I know they are deep.”

“Yes,” he replied, in his understated way. “Yes, they are.”

The last presentations were over, along with the semester. Some of the students would not be returning to me because they were now able to navigate through their college and graduate programs on their own. Feng was one of these. The irony of my job is that once my students have enough of a grasp of English to begin to really share their complex personalities, I have to let them go. I told this to Feng as we parted at the classroom door.

“But don’t worry,” he said. “I will be here on campus for the next 2 years finishing my MBA. I will visit you in your office.”

“Please do,” I whispered as I squeezed his hand goodbye.

**Fishing for Hearts**

All along I believed that I was the one who was fishing for my students’ hearts. I wanted to feel that I am a little like Hemingway in teaching them that the process is what’s most important. I ached not only to catch them up into English language proficiency, but also to hook them deeply into loving what words mean.

But I know now that there was much more. Each one of my students was stealthily fishing for me—Hsiu-hao with his smiles as he conquered new words, Karla with her hugs as she appreciated her own culture in a different language, Jing with her new start, and Feng with his depth that I will never fully have the opportunity to delve into.

They hooked me, and then they reeled me in. They were the master fishermen. And I found in the end that it was my heart that was captured after all.

**References**


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Stealthy Short Forms

I’m having an identity crisis (IC), and I don’t see any resolution in my near future. I am a returning student (RS) to higher education (HE) in pursuit of a doctor of philosophy degree in education, focusing on language and literacy (PhD of Ed in L&L) at Washington State University, Pullman (WSU-P, or simply WAZZU). It is here that I recently caught myself drowning in alphabet soup.

Although acronyms and initialisms are important in helping people describe and communicate, we sometimes find ourselves in contexts where they cease to be helpful or accurate. In our efforts to communicate more efficiently, the short forms—which stealthily permeate our personal and professional lives—often limit our audiences, impede the messages we are trying to communicate, and therefore need to be exposed.

Nunberg (2003) chronicles the use of acronyms through time. Many were originally created for use in a military context, but the trend of making acronyms and initials has become commonplace in the home as well: PB & J (peanut butter and jelly), SUV (sport utility vehicle), VCR (videocassette recorder), and TP (toilet paper). Some of them are so commonly used as words that we don’t know or remember what they stand for. For example, we all know what OK means, but what does it stand for? Grant (2002) reports that the most commonly accepted explanation is “A #1 OK,” where OK stood for all correct and, at the time, was simply a KEWL (cool) spelling of the word.

My point is that acronyms and initialized words have become common to us and are individualized to our particular social circles. We don’t see them, we don’t think about their use, and we especially don’t think about their origins. Neither do we think about how they affect us or our students, for whom they may not be so common.

If I, as a native English speaker, get confused, I can only imagine how difficult the world of acronyms and initialisms might be from the perspective of a nonnative speaker (NNS). They can be a major headache for students in general, but especially those learning English as a second or additional language (ESL/EAL). Anyone who has attempted to decipher text messaging can attest to this. Text messaging is one format that English for specific purposes (ESP) students might be confronted with, although one wonders if it is really English. Here is a short list of common phrases: BRB, JK, LOL, OTP, NP, TTYL, ROFL (translation: be right back, just kidding, laughing out loud, on the phone, no problem, talk to you later, rolling on floor laughing; Ulaby, 2006). Are you familiar with these? Some students may use this language with ease, but for language learners (LLs), it could pose an extra challenge. SWIM? (See what I mean?)

Text messaging is not the only example of short forms found in schools. In our efforts to help students learn (or, as in the following examples, perform better on standardized tests and writing prompts), we teachers invent and inundate them with even more acronyms. The following English for academic purposes (EAP) acronyms, FATPIG and CHEXMIX, are from a fellow teacher in Maryland:

F: Format
A: Audience
T: Topic
P: Purpose
IG: Information guide (what the prompt required students to write about; usually a list of three things)

This example is reasonable, and I’m sure you could add more to the list, but this same teacher expresses her frustration at another “really dumb one” that is “way too long” and “redundant.” Moreover, the expectation was that the teachers in the school use class time to teach and test students on it. She was referring to this:

Check your answers.
Help yourself by reading the questions first.
Extend your response.
X-tra time should be used to review work.
Make sure you bubble in completely.
Interpret graphs and pictures.
Xpect success.

This teacher hopes she got it correct and concludes by saying, “You can imagine how such a fulfilling activity fostered creativity and encouraged divergent thinking.” We intend for short forms to be helpful; sometimes they are not.

Background Scramble

The story of my current crisis began the moment I became horrified by the sudden realization that I had thoughtlessly misapplied a short form—three seemingly innocent capital letters—to some of my students. Before we get to...
that moment, however, I need to provide some background.

As a doctoral student, I know I should be attending professional conferences. It seems that part of my professional socialization is to learn diverse epistemologies, become steeped in my field, and discover my communities of practice (COPs; Pallas, 2001). Conference attendance is one way to do that. To assist with this endeavor, some schools are creating conference courses for academic credit in the hopes that graduate students will go (Fiorentino, Manson, & Whalen, 2005). Conference Alerts (http://www.conferencealerts.com/) is a general interest Web site that contains an enormous list of academic and professional conferences, although the education postings are noticeably sparse in comparison to other fields.

Conferences are important; that message is clear. And I will attend. But which ones? Here is my teaching background; maybe you can help me decide:

- Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) to high school students via satellite programming (SP)
- General elementary education (GEE)
- English as a second language to adults (ESL-A)
- English as a foreign language to university students (EFL-U) in Azerbaijan
- English as a second language to elementary students (ESL-E)
- Spanish (and English) to first-grade students (dual language [DL], two-way instruction [TWI], language enrichment [LE], heritage language maintenance [HLM], bilingual education [BE], and second language acquisition [SLA])

So, I am an SFL, GEE, ESL-A, EFL-U, ESL-E, DL, TWI, LE, HLM, BE, and SLA instructor and have studied, to varying levels of competency, Spanish, American Sign Language, Bislama, Azerbaijani, Russian, and French. I have attended conferences of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). I have considered attending the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) and Modern Language Association (MLA) conferences but for various reasons have not. Nothing seems like a good fit.

**Multilingual Language Educator**

I tell you my background because I am having an identity crisis, and I have problems deciding which conference to attend for the very reason that I consider myself a language educator (LE) and I advocate for multilingualism (ML). That would make me a multilingual language educator (MLLE). I struggle with the structure of the language education field because there seems to be an assumption, at least in my experience, that educators and scholars naturally fall into one camp or another. Depending on what camp you fall into, you join with the people who are like you (your COP), attend the same conference, and gain sustenance from their favorite variety of alphabet soup. The fact remains that I don’t yet belong to one COP, let alone many, and I don’t know what I would/could/should be.

**Student Labels and the Minicrisis**

I am not the only one with a confusing identity or the lack of an appropri-
ate label; students suffer as well. Within the language education field, student labels come and go. Which of them are useful? The term English as a second language has been a popular one for describing LLs and continues to be so—a welcome alternative to limited English proficient (LEP).

Things have slowly evolved, however, with the realization that many students already come to the table knowing multiple languages and study EAL. In response, many educators have adopted the term English language learners (ELLs) for these students. Assuredly, this is an improvement, but still not very helpful during my recent minicrisis about how to label my students—which short form to use—for a paper I was writing.

I recently submitted a manuscript for review to the California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (CATESOL). In a moment of panic, I realized I had thoughtlessly and carelessly been referring to all the students (Ss) participating in a dual language program (DLP) as ELLs, which they clearly were not. American, blond-haired, blue-eyed Quinton and Anton came to mind (names have been changed to protect the innocent). Gasp!

How do we label a child whose first language (L1) is English and who is learning a second language (L2) in a DLP? (Everybody has a label, right?) Certainly we do not refer to them as ELLs or ESL students, the most common descriptors at this time for students in language education programs. But these fluent English speakers are part of a bilingual program (which is mistakenly considered by some as an ESL program and by others as a Spanish-only language program). As a professional, I am now all too aware of how, at times, we thoughtlessly (mis)use our extensive yet inadequate supply of acronyms and initialisms to communicate.

**Boxed and Referenced**

So it seems that when talking of acronyms and their appropriate use, I’m not the only one who is drowning. The context may change, but the problems remain. Acronyms are easily confused with initialisms, abbreviations, and short forms, and they can all be confusing. I recently Googled “acronym list” and came up with 842,000 hits, one of which is a Wikipedia page that has acronyms, initialisms, and pseudoblends. That list is hardly complete, but it is sure to grow over time; I just added ELL.

It seems that, in addition to the standard reference materials of dictionary, thesaurus, and spell checker, we now need a thorough acronym, initialism, and short form book. A multidisciplinary Acronym Finder can be found at http://acronyms.thefreedictionary.com/ although it may result in more confusion than clarification. This kind of resource might be just what the professional discourses need, but it is also something that LLs could benefit from.

To return to my current identity crisis, I, for one, would like to be part of the field of language education. To do anything else feels too confining. I would like to be able to attend a conference that encompasses all of these areas—all of my interests regarding language learning and teaching—and has insightful paper presentations and provocative discussions in which I can participate. I would like this field to come together so that we can streamline our terminology and conversations, in effect, sending clear messages to policy makers and the public that will have a positive impact on language learners.

Is it possible to take ourselves out of the professional boxes in which we have put ourselves and to do the same for our students? Can we stop classifying and simply realize that we are all LEs and LLs?

**References**


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In the 5 years I spent teaching in Moldova and Russia, I became accustomed to having the biggest desk in class. I needed it. I had books and handouts, audiovisual tools, and my coffee. Then I came back to California and enrolled in an intensive Russian course. I was eager for a chance to play student. I’d seen my Moldovan students make progress in 2-month courses and have fun doing so, and now it was my turn.

Ten other students and I waited in little chair-desk combos. The teacher, a native Russian speaker and graduate student in the university’s film studies program, entered the room. She took her coffee to the big desk.

I lasted only 2 days.

Was it the teacher’s fault? Well, yes, to a degree. But the troubling thing for the teacher inside me was that I recognized all her missteps, had made them myself, and, in some cases, was still making them. What follows is an account of what I learned when I became a student again.

First-Day Syndrome

“This is the first day,” our teacher said, “so . . . .”

And in the pause that followed, we understood not much learning would be asked of us that day. I had done the same thing as a teacher on the first day of school. Why not? My students had never protested having an easy day. I would have bet that they liked taking it easy. Although it’s true that I had never actually asked them.

I don’t know why I expected this Russian class to have an action-packed opening. Probably because I needed it.

To get to this class, I had traveled 50 miles by car and train, a journey of 2 hours. Speculating that learning Russian would be great, I was planning to rent a room in the dormitory. But if I were disappointed, I could still drop the class in the first week and receive a refund for most of my $2,000 tuition.

Those unwelcome words—“This is the first day”—implied that today would be unrepresentative and that I would have to wait until the following class session before forming an opinion. I thought of my private school in Moldova, where I had taught for nearly 3 years. On first days I saw students in little chairs, waiting for my entrance; I did not imagine how far they had come, in what conditions, leaving at home any number of problems.

Tongue-Tied (to Students’ Native Language)

Although this was intermediate Russian, the first hours of the course offered no Russian. T (our teacher) believed that it was necessary to go over the syllabus and the structure of the course in English. What message did this send to us students? That Russian was merely a subject, not a language used for serious communication.

Perhaps no other student was dismayed by an English syllabus, but I had entertained notions of forming a habit with my fellow students: speaking Russian together.

“But if we were not expected to understand Russian in the classroom, what chance did we have of conversing in the dorm, during lunch or breaks, or at the pub?”

“If we give explanations in English,” I had heard English teachers overseas say in defense, “students won’t understand.” But that is unfair. The onus of understanding the target language is not entirely on the student. It is equally the teacher’s job to be understood.

About the Textbook

T introduced us to our required textbook. There were some mistakes, she said, but the book wasn’t too bad. The cost of this textbook, which “wasn’t too bad” either, was more than $80. During break, a miffed classmate said, “Can’t they find a bad book that’s only $20?”
In the past, I’d disparaged textbooks or particular drills to my students, too. Why had I drawn attention to deficient sections rather than ignore them? To suggest to the class that I was smarter than the textbook writers? If that was the case, why not adjust the materials or make up my own?

**Introductions: Target Language Again**

After the syllabus reading, T asked us to introduce ourselves, in Russian or English. Most students were nervous, so they chose English. Two of us, including myself, tried Russian. T listened, but her responses soon rolled into English. Perhaps she hoped to avoid alienating the students who felt that their Russian was inadequate—a noble goal, I suppose, except that the purpose of any language course is to engage learners in the language, not to shield them from it.

In reverting to English, T broadcast messages that were probably unintentional. First, I understood from her that our Russian was not as good as her English, from which we could easily extrapolate that it never would be. This did little for our confidence. Second, I understood that there is a rule of expedience in bi- and multilingual exchanges: Conversations should be carried out using the language that leads most quickly to results. This, of course, is how things are done in international business and even in authentic discourse on the streets. But in a language learning environment, the results that matter are student practice and confidence.

**Monitor Me**

T warned us that when she taught Russian, her students claimed she spoke in English too much. Most language teachers speak more than they should, whether in the local language or the target language. (For me, it’s only English, but I still talk too much. I am always trying to cut down, admonishing myself for wandering instructions or making an observation just to fill the silence.)

“So,” T said, “if I talk too much, let me know.”

On the surface this sounds fair enough. The teacher acknowledges a fault and asks for student monitoring. But the teacher provides no real format: How do we let her know? When? What is too much? (For me, any English was too much). More patently, why assign students the responsibility?

**Why?**

Aside from introductions, the only activity we did on the first day was conjugating verbs. We had a list on a handout: to bake, to run, to crawl, to hide. From left to right, around our crescent of little desks, one by one, each of us conjugated one verb on the list. We went around the class twice, and I bungled both of my opportunities. This felt unjust because I knew the other verbs. But in the restrictive design of the activity, there was no chance to offer other answers or to explore the language in any way. No chance for redemption, either.

I was still a little rankled at lunch, and I complained about the activity to a bright classmate in whom I’d noticed teacherly...
instincts. “Those verbs,” she said, “had nothing in common. There was no topic, and they mixed perfective and imperfective. What the hell?”

Which led to the question: Why were we doing that activity? An activity needs justification (Ur, 1996). Students deserve to know how they can benefit from the task.

T advised us to memorize conjugations for half an hour every day. That was how she had learned languages, she explained. I will memorize conjugations until the cows come home if I think it’s worthwhile, if I am convinced that doing so has a strong correlation with language acquisition and usage. Teachers don’t need to write a thesis to prove the value of every activity, but students deserve to know if what they are doing is useful.

“That was how I learned” is not sufficient justification.

It Isn’t Easy
Several times on the second day of the course, T pointed out the richness of the Russian language, the large number of exceptions, and the overall difficulty that nonnative speakers have in mastering this language. I did not doubt it. But did I need to be reminded? Did I need to know that I might never speak beautiful Russian, no matter how much time I devoted to learning it? I preferred travel writer Paul Theroux’s (1995) assessment that “no language is difficult. . . . Language is an activity, learned through practice” (p. 118).

But in my teaching career, I had done this, too. I had pointed out some of the tougher areas of English. Now I wondered why. Usually I had done so as if we all shared an inside joke, as if the idiosyncrasies of language, like the behaviors of an embarrassing cousin, could take years to accept.

Learning a language is a lifelong endeavor, but that’s not the point. One is always improving, making progress, reaching goals, and reaping rewards along the way. Shouldn’t that be the focus of our teaching?

I left the intensive summer session in Russian after 2 days. In my notebook I’d scribbled notes on several pages—mostly about teaching. Some of what I describe in this article I had already read about in Practical Techniques for Language Teaching (Lewis & Hill, 1985), which we were fortunate to have in the office at my Moldova school. But the advice hadn’t sunk in. It took a stint—even a brief one—in the student chair to really understand how what comes from teachers’ mouths has more impact than we may realize, how we transmit to students all sorts of messages that we’re unaware of.

I didn’t quit Russian completely. That same summer I flew to the Midwest and enrolled in a larger program. Some of the instructors were old-school, but mine was creative and inspiring. You cannot truly assess pedagogical tactics as a teacher observing another teacher’s class, not the way you can as a student sitting in one of the little desks. From that vantage point, you are privy to the straight dope from your fellow students. If they find a teacher boring, they share it with you. If they adore a teacher, they tell you that, too.

Since that time, I’ve enrolled in other courses: Russian, Japanese, Spanish. I don’t always finish them, but then again, who says I have to?

TESOL professionals attend conferences, read journals, join training sessions—all of which is of great value. But now and then, when it comes to teacher development, there’s nothing like the little desk.

References


Kevin McCaughey is a freelance materials developer and teacher trainer.
Man #1: Wow! That’s the 4th date you’ve been on this week?

Man #2: I’ve been on this new online dating site. It’s free for girls and guys pay about 30 bucks a month for a premium membership. There are tons of girls on there.

Man #1: They must be pretty desperate though. And they wouldn’t need to be on there if they were a decent catch.

Man #2: That’s what I thought, but there are a lot of good-looking girls who hate the bar scene because they get hit on constantly by slimy guys. This way they can see your profile and see if you have anything in common.

(034—Online Dating, 2007)

This dialogue appears on China 232, a podcast for learning English. For many ESOL students, dating is a popular topic of discussion in a language classroom. As English language teachers or former ESOL students, many of us probably have talked about various issues related to dating and marriage in our classrooms. Students can learn about cultural expectations and personal challenges through reading literature, viewing films, and engaging in class discussion. This theme also addresses diversity of sexual identities, helping us develop sensitivity and critical understanding of sociopolitical debates as well as normative assumptions about sexuality in terms of dating and marriage (Nelson, 2008).

Discussions of dating in the ESOL classroom become quite real when students find or want to find a cross-cultural, cross-linguistic dating partner with whom they can communicate in English.

English for Dating Purposes

In the December 2007 issue of Essential Teacher, Elena Webb discusses her fascinating experience of teaching English for dating purposes (EDP; see “A Foreign Language for a Foreign Affair”). She describes her experience of developing English lessons in Russia in response to the needs of single or divorced Russian women who subscribe to an online dating service. She began reading this article with interest, partly because she herself had been on some online dating sites.

As a nonnative-English-speaking Japanese woman living in the United States, I can empathize with the potential communication challenges described in Webb’s article. Even with English language proficiency, I found it hard to navigate the nuances between lines on the screen and subtle cultural undertones. Sometimes I received messages from Chinese men in China, written in Chinese, which unfortunately I can neither write nor speak. Perhaps these men found my photo, thought I looked Chinese, and wrote to me without reading my profile in English.

Having such experiences made me speculate on how hard it could be for a Russian woman with little English proficiency to try to communicate with a potential partner in English. The example of Chinese messages sent to me also points to the frivolousness of online dating communication, which can be seen when one person contacts another and neglects to carefully scrutinize the person being contacted. This indifference has the potential to expose people to serious personal risks.

Online Dating Not So Rosy

Webb’s article reminded me of one of the American men I met online. He talked about mail-order bride services that cater to American men looking for Russian women. His friend joined a tour of Russia that was arranged by one of these mail-order agencies, and in Russia he was introduced to women at parties arranged by the agency. He found a partner, and the agency provided support for her visa application.

I wondered how American men and Russian women would commu-
nicate in those social situations and in their online correspondence. Of course well-educated Russian women, like the ones interviewed by Johnson (2007), would likely be able to use English. But what about women who did not know much, or perhaps any, English? The Web site of Anastasia International, a major U.S.-based mail-order bride service, states that the company provides translation and interpretation service for e-mail and telephone calls. Even with such service, though, dating or marrying someone without a shared language is beyond my imagination. It seems that EDP, as described by Webb, is indeed useful for someone seeking an English-speaking partner.

But do all the stories of women on international online dating sites end happily? Unfortunately, the answer seems to be no. Some of them suffer abuse, violence, and even human trafficking. In response to repeated incidents of this kind, the U.S. Congress passed the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act (IMBRA) in 2005, which requires background checks for anyone using mail-order bride services.

Construction of Femininity of Non-Western Women

Perhaps the victims of such horrific crimes are not the majority. So, then, is intercultural and transnational online romance harmless and exciting? Yes and no. As long as a woman is being as careful as she is with her fellow citizens, she can have a fascinating intercultural experience. However, I am concerned about the way in which online dating is perpetuating the image of submissive non-Western women—women with a lower status than men or, in fact, people in the West in general.

Before addressing my concern, I want to point out that even with online dating services, which are distinguished from mail-order bride services in that member contacts are not moderated by the agency, you see a specific pattern of supply and demand. For instance, in one U.S.-based online dating service targeting Asian clientele, the overwhelming pattern is non-Asian women (many of whom are Caucasian) seeking Asian women and vice versa. There are very few Asian men or non-Asian women on the listings, except in China, where most male listings are by Chinese men. This indicates that, in general, international online dating services cater to Western men seeking non-Western women. This demand for non-Western women naturally contains an underlying assumption that perpetuates a particular image of these women.

For instance, an online dating Web site called ChanceForLove Dating Network (ChanceForLove Online Russian Dating Network, 2003–2008) states:

The Russian woman’s attitude about herself is feminine. She expects to be treated as a lady, she is the weaker gender and knows it. The Russian woman has not been exposed to the world of rampant feminism that asserts its rights in America. (¶ 3)

This depicts Russian women as feminine and submissive, positioned opposite to feminism in the United States (for a different interpretation of feminists among Russian women, see Johnson, 2007). Familiar gendered cultural stereotypes are projected onto these women, producing certain power relations among Western men, Western women, and Russian women.

In her critical appraisal of the mainstream scholarship of intercultural communication, Piller (2007) argues that the popular notion of cultural difference exists against a backdrop of global inequality and injustice. Citing a mail-order bride Web site that describes Filipina, Russian, and Thai women with traditional female qualities such as...
as being loyal, shy, devoted, family oriented, feminine, submissive, selfless, and having traditional values, Piller points out that the economic gap between the global North and the global South spurs women into mail-order international marriages. These women are associated with familiar cultural labels that attract male clientele and sustain the online dating and marriage business.

I am sure that many women from the global South who are on online dating sites are indeed a “decent catch,” though perhaps many of them are also desperate to find better economic conditions. Furthermore, they might support these cultural labels themselves, which ultimately works to the advantage of men. Not all of the women from the global South suffer from abuse and violence, but they can easily become victims and perhaps perpetrators of gender and cultural stereotypes.

The Role of English Language Teachers

When I am on online dating sites, I do not usually imagine myself becoming a silent victim of sexual abuse and violence. This is because I can communicate in a language I am comfortable with and I am no longer a totally naïve newcomer to the online dating scene. I am also professionally and economically stable and have legal protection.

However, many women in the global South perhaps come to this online experience with limited second language proficiency or knowledge of online culture, not to mention almost no legal protection (IMBRA might help in this respect). Furthermore, many of these women, perhaps uncritically, accept the specific gender and cultural identities constructed for them, which reproduce relations of power between men and women and among people from Western and non-Western societies.

Some ESOL students may be seeking a romantic partner online. So as TESOL professionals, we need to be aware of the social, cultural, and ideological consequences as well as the possibilities of teaching and learning English for dating purposes, or any other purposes for that matter. Certainly, acquiring linguistic skills and cultural knowledge would empower women from other countries who are trying to connect with Western men. Marriage to a Western man may be liberating for a woman who wants to escape oppressive local conditions, but is it liberating if she joins a partner who believes that a woman from her culture is “the weaker gender” unexposed to “feminism that asserts its rights in America”? Of course, not all men seeking women from other countries have this belief.

It could also be argued that teachers cannot or should not try to control ESOL learners’ personal lives. However, wouldn’t this stance merely fuel existing gender and racial/ethnic stereotypes and inequalities?

Teachers who take a critical stance can challenge gender/race/economic inequalities while helping students seek a better personal life. Teachers can work with students on not only needs analysis, but also rights analysis—exploring ways to respond to unfavorable conditions (Benesch, 2001). Teachers can empower students by helping them become aware that learning a language is not just about acquiring words and phrases, but also about understanding how language use is linked to a web of ideologies that perpetuates inequalities and yet provides enormous opportunities for personal and social transformation.

References


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Many of my Chinese EFL students have believed that the more words they are exposed to, the better their vocabulary will be. Therefore, they have spent much time and energy on sheer memorization of new words. Although I greatly admire their diligence and hard work, I feel that they are not getting the results that they should be getting for all of their efforts.

EFL studies on vocabulary (e.g., Huang & Gu, 1996) reveal that vocabulary exercises that involve memorization of long lists of words and tedious word-by-word phrase translation are usually not effective due to their decontextualized and fragmented nature. That may be one reason that many hardworking nonnative-speaking English majors still cannot speak and write the language effectively after several years of study. That is why I have become interested in helping students enhance their vocabulary through the creation of stories.

Skehan (1998) holds that meaning-embedded activities can speed up the rate of students’ language development. Thus, as an EFL teacher, I now strive to devise activities that emphasize context and meaning. Cook (1991) points out that students should be asked to explain new words through relevant content. This method is particularly effective when students tell stories to each other using their new vocabulary (Richards, 2001).

**Story Creation During Class**

I teach English reading to a class of second-year English majors at the School of Foreign Languages of Yangzhou University, in China. The class consists of 30 students whose average age is 21. They have been learning English for 8–10 years and have different English proficiency levels. But they have one thing in common: The vocabulary reinforcement exercises they have done in the university are mostly vocabulary memorization or translations. To inspire them to approach new words with enthusiasm and interest, I have them create stories using newly learned vocabulary.

Take the word *turn*, for example. First, I help students familiarize themselves with various usages for the word by dictating a few sentences that appear in their textbook, *College English* (Yang & Xu, 1996, pp. 124–125):

- This was only a minor victory, but it turned her head and made her proud.
- At that time, she turned a deaf ear to all these warnings.
- Her request was turned down.
- She thought this job would be easy, but it turned out to be extremely difficult.
- She turned over a new leaf.
- She turned it over in her mind.

Then I ask students to create stories using *turn* in its many contexts. Some students create stories about their own or their friends’ experiences, as in the following example:

Alice got the first prize in the sports meeting. This was only a minor victory, but it turned her head and made her proud. She thought that she was a gifted player and unnecessary to train with other players any longer. However, Lucy, as her best friend, often reminded her of calming down. But Alice *turned* a deaf ear to all these warnings. She thought that Lucy envied her success.

One month later, their school sent Alice to take part in a match to compete with many good players from other schools. She thought this job would be easy, but it *turned* out not to be so easy. Because of so many days’ without training, she got the last place. It’s a great disgrace to her.

“Nobody will believe in me anymore” she thought, “How can I face my classmates?” But to her surprise, Lucy said to her “We are friends, so we will share happiness and sorrows no matter what happens. I’m sure you will have a bright future if you consider yourself properly.”

Alice *turned* Lucy’s words over in her mind. Eventually, she realized friendship is so precious that no one can do without it. Early next morning, there’s a girl running in the playground. That’s Alice. She *turned* over a new leaf from then on.

Other students create stories about famous stars, as in this example:

As Zoe Zhang dreamed, she won the award because of the movie she performed “My Father and My Mother.” This was a minor victory, but it *turned* her mind and made her
proud. She was not as pure as before. Many of her friends suggested that she should get further professional training, because there was greater challenge on the international stage. However, she turned a deaf ear to all the warnings. She thought she was the greatest actress in the mainland. She asked the director for expensive dress and precious jewelry to attend the Oscar Award Ceremony. But her request was turned down.

As she faced the foreign journalist, her poor English made her laughed at by many people. She thought this job was easy, but it turned out to be extremely difficult. The road is not always paved with roses. She became more patient. She began to keep in touch with her friends, and listened to their suggestions. She turned over a new leaf from that day on.

After students write their stories, they share them with their classmates. The works are refined and modified through peer editing and teacher evaluation until they are deemed good enough for public display.

Story Creation After Class

During class, I usually provide students with a context for their new words. For homework, I encourage them to create their own context. For example, sentence translations from Chinese into English do not usually capture my students’ interest, but I encourage them to look for contextual connections among the sentences to create a semantic, relevant context (see “The Most Dangerous Game” Sentence Translations). Students focus on different sentences in the exercise based on their interests, previous knowledge, and experiences. One student created a moving story using 7 of the 14 sentences in a slightly modified way:

I was the wife of a soldier who lost both his legs in a war. Although life became more miserable to me after his tragedy, I was not going to leave him on that score. He was still a hero in my heart. At the beginning, mental strain was so much that he often lost his temper for no reason. But gradually with my help and assurance, he gained hope and began to tell me what happened to him in the war that claimed 10,000 people. He said that but for the wild plants, many of the soldiers would have starved to death while crossing the marshland. One day, the visibility was so poor that no matter

“The Most Dangerous Game” Sentence Translations

1. A peasant woman found him lying unconscious in the grass. She carried him home, dressed his wound, and hid him in the attic.
2. We should focus our attention on the development of science and education.
3. This photograph is out of focus.
4. This camera is easy to handle because it has an automatic focus.
5. Visibility was poor that day and no matter how you strained your eyes, you still couldn’t see very far.
6. The mental strain was too much for him, and he began to lose sleep.
7. But for his wife, he would never have been able to finish college.
8. But for the wild plants, many of us would have starved to death while crossing the marshlands.
9. It was a close match. The final score was 89 to 96 in our favor.
10. Her husband lost both his legs in an accident, but she was not going to leave him on that score.
11. We must admit that they have scored a point. Now the ball is in our court.
12. She found a wallet near the booking office. She decided to stay there in case someone might come to claim it.
13. They claimed to have found proof for their theory that dinosaurs became extinct because of a global fire caused by the collision of a heavenly body with the earth.
14. The earthquake claimed 25,000 people.

Note: From Yang & Xu, 1996, p. 337.
how much he strained his eyes, he still could not see very far. He did not recognize the enemies until his legs were shot. When he came to himself, he found he was lying in the bed of a peasant woman. The woman found him when he lost consciousness and carried him home. Then she dressed his wound and hid him in the attic until the war was over. I couldn’t help crying when I heard everything. We decided to try every means to find that woman and thank her with all our hearts.

Accurate Word Use

As Skehan (1998) remarks, activities aimed at promoting awareness of language form, making students conscious of particular language features, and encouraging them to use these features are more likely to yield long-lasting language learning. Story creation activities give students opportunities to utilize their new vocabulary in interesting and personalized ways, as shown in some of my students’ reflections:

Story-creation activity is designed in such a way as to force the use of particular structures.

The phrases used in that story are carved in my mind, because our stories are so interesting that they help us remember the sentence patterns easily. In daily life, some of the patterns come out of our mouth unconsciously and often give us a big surprise.

Story creation activities also require students to organize their thoughts effectively and logically. For example, they are more able to create an interesting plot by learning and improving on skills such as exemplification, classification, cause and effect, and compare and contrast.

In addition, because the stories will be presented in spoken and written form to classmates and students in other classes, students are motivated to pay special attention to accuracy in grammar and word usage. This outcome is supported by Skehan (1998), who asserts that language learners who are pushed or challenged to “go public” will strive harder to reach a higher level of accuracy.

Active Learning

Story creation helps students break away from traditional word translation exercises and provides them with many opportunities to be actively involved in their own language learning. It also ensures maximum class participation, as revealed by the following student reflections:

This activity can make the class more lively and full of vitality.

This activity makes me quick-witted and requires me to be imaginative.

It stimulates my interest in learning new words and phrases.

Storytelling is like a stone that can kill two birds. On one hand, it enables students to put what they have learned into real use. On the other hand, it is a way of being creative. To create the beginning, conflicts, suspense, and ending for their stories, students have to think in imaginative and unique ways to recreate their experiences and ideas. Creating stories also activates the word-building process because the more words that are accumulated, the more creatively they can be used.

Stories as Motivation

Compared to conventional word repetition and translation activities, story creation is more effective in putting new words into rich contexts and developing students’ language skills. Through exchanging stories, students not only broaden their horizons and improve their insights, but also stretch their imaginations and keep their creative spirits alive. Because stories are fundamental to students’ personal experiences and sense of identity, creating stories fosters a classroom community of motivated learners. This holistic, integrative, and collaborative technique continually helps my students become confident and successful learners.

References


Fang Ying is a teacher of English in the School of Foreign Languages, Yangzhou University, in China.

See also “Word Choices: Developing Vocabulary in Creative Writing,” http://www.tesol.org/et/.
It’s approaching noon. Ying, from China, is helping a literacy student from Ethiopia. Anna, from Russia, is working with a student from Vietnam. Fatiha, the Algerian teaching assistant, is helping a Haitian student prepare for her citizenship interview. Khadija finishes a half-hour tutoring stint and leaves for her afternoon class as Maureen, a doctoral student in intercultural relations at Lesley College, arrives, soon to be joined by two young Mormon missionaries and a Buddhist monk, all of whom volunteer every Tuesday in our large ESOL literacy class for adult immigrants.

The students enter one by one, greet each other, hang their coats in the closet, and settle down to study or chat before class. This room has become their second home. At noon, Fatiha steps behind a curtain in the corner of the room to pray. Later, during break time, a few Muslim students will do the same. The classroom is warm and inviting to all—teachers, tutors, and students.

Our Students
The students in our school are from Asia, Southern Europe, North Africa, and Central and South America. Childhood illness or poverty deprived them of education. For some, this is their first school. Others attended a few years of school sporadically between periods of farm work, political disruption, or illness. They may have worked full-time from the age of 5. Their adult lives of long work hours and child rearing have left no time for classes, forcing them to rely on children or spouses to read and write for them. Some cope with a variety of learning challenges, making literacy difficult in spite of high motivation and intelligence. It would be difficult to find a more motivated and appreciative group of students. Their determination is truly inspiring.

The literacy students range from those who are nonliterate with no English skills to fluent English speakers and readers with low writing skills. The latter may spend an average of 6 months in the literacy class. The former, and those with learning challenges, may continue the class for a few years.

Our Volunteers
Our one-room schoolhouse is on the second floor of the Immigrant Learning Center (ILC) in the heart of Malden, Massachusetts, in the United States, and is funded by donations from banks, corporations, and private foundations. Our student body, volunteers, and staff reflect the diversity of this area, representing dozens of nationalities. Currently, 24 community members and advanced ILC students volunteer on a weekly basis, substantially accelerating the reading and writing progress of the students they help. Imagine learning to read Chinese or Arabic for the first time as an adult. It would take countless hours of study and practice. The value of a one-on-one reading tutor for an adult who is learning to read for the first time is incalculable.

What attracts volunteers? They love to be here. For community volunteers, it’s a wonderful way to meet people from all over the world, to learn about the different cultures in our “Mini United Nations of Malden.” And the sense of satisfaction that they get from helping another adult learn to read is immeasurable. For ILC student volunteers, working here is a way to give back to the school and the community and to reinforce their own English knowledge and confidence by helping others. This use of advanced students as peer tutors is a return on investment, and the yield has been high.

Two of these student volunteers have joined the teaching staff. Four and a half years ago, Fatiha, an experienced high school math teacher, began to volunteer 12 hours a week. Her work with the students was so effective that a year later she was hired as a teaching assistant. Today she continues as my assistant teacher. She also teaches beginning conversation and sits on our board of directors. Galina, from Ukraine, entered our Level 1 ESOL class a few years ago and progressed through Level 5. She now works part-time as a teaching assistant. Today, with the help of Fatiha, Galina, and two dozen volunteers, we are able to work with 35 students at a time.

New volunteers learn first by observation, then by guided and supervised work with individual students. The use of volunteers allows me to customize instruction for individual students and to observe, assess, and adjust as needed.

As a student once commented about my teaching style, “You do anything that works, short of standing on your head.”
Class Structure
A program like this needs ample space. Our classroom is very large and has many learning areas, which enables us to regroup easily without tripping over each other. The class runs from noon to 2 p.m., but some reading tutors arrive at 11:30 a.m. to work with students who arrive 30 minutes early for extra reading practice. Fatiha pairs the tutors with students, trying to give equal access to all who arrive early.

Once class begins, Fatiha and Galina lead the two larger groups. For writing activities, I use volunteers to subdivide each group in order to accommodate students who need more time. Volunteers work one on one with students who need individual help with reading lessons, dictations, and specific skill-related tasks. During this time I am able to circulate, observe and monitor the activities, or to sit with groups or individuals to focus on their needs.

Materials
It’s not easy to find appropriate materials for adult ESOL literacy students. Some phonics-based materials designed for preliterate adult English language learners rely too heavily on forced and artificial language to use words that rhyme. Other materials designed for adult literacy are unsuitable because they assume familiarity with vocabulary that is far beyond the level of beginning English language learners. Material for young children is rarely suitable for a number of reasons, although there are exceptions.

For example, our students have thoroughly enjoyed Dr. Seuss for supplementary reading; the vocabulary is simple, phonics based, repetitive, and amply illustrated, and the humor appeals to all ages.

Finding effective materials for students with no English skills and no understanding of the sound–symbol association is a challenge, so I use a variety of methods and materials. For first-time readers with no English skills, I use real objects such as maps, hats, and fans for the initial vocabulary. Then we build from that using the following:

- **Color:** We use colored index cards, sentence strips, and Post-It notes. Depending on the lesson, I may use different colors for vowels and consonants; for word roots and suffixes; for adjectives and nouns; or for subjects, verbs, and complements. This makes it easy to see, for example, that a word always has a vowel and a sentence always has a verb.

- **Rule-lined wipe-off charts and sentence strips:** The large wipe-off charts are used for cooperative dictations, with two to three students working together. Sometimes I have students write with markers on wipe-off sentence strips so I can look around the table and observe as they write. Thus, I can help them self-correct as they write, which is more effective than handing back their papers to correct after the fact.

- **Pocket charts:** These are used with index cards for many purposes, including word construction, sentence construction, sorting and classification, arranging by alphabetic order, and vowel-sound matching. For the latter, each row of the chart represents one vowel sound, as indicated by a one-syllable cue word contain-
The school respects the teachers’ abilities to choose the methods and materials that are most effective for our individual teaching styles.

For pronunciation practice, I keep sets of minimal pairs specific to different nationalities (e.g., met-mess and pan-fan for Vietnamese students). I also have a model mouth (molded with air-drying clay from a plastic model borrowed from my dentist) that we often use to show the tongue positions for the sounds of various letters.

For writing and spelling practice, I use lists of the most common words, introducing 10 new words plus 10 phonics-based words (e.g., hat-hate, man-main) each week. Students are guided to create sentences with each of the 20 words on the list and quizzed on spelling at the end of the week. We also use a language experience approach to writing—sharing, writing, and then reading personal stories.

Instruction for Functional Literacy

The results of the literacy program have been exciting. Students are thrilled to finally achieve functional literacy. But an unconventional classroom may defy conventional wisdom. Our goal is literacy, our methods vary from student to student, and our outcomes are the ability to read street signs, labels, and notices; to write checks and fill out application and registration forms; and to obtain jobs, higher levels of education, and even citizenship.

You will find no lesson plans on my desk. Our student-centered lessons and objectives are created and modified dynamically in accordance with students’ progress and difficulties. It is our respect for the students; our familiarity with their personalities, needs, and abilities; and our flexibility in meeting their individual learning styles that make learning possible. Assessment is ongoing from direct observation and daily feedback. Students may be pulled out for individual help, and larger groups subdivided as needed. Materials and lessons are adjusted dynamically to provide more practice or depth of instruction. Objectives may be reset higher or lower to accommodate the pace of each student.

The process is fluid and flexible; it bends to the needs of the students, and it would not survive the encumbrance of standardized testing and lesson plans.

Respect for Students and Teachers

With respect to educational trends, I believe in our students’ ability to recognize what helps them learn. Phonics may go in and out of fashion, but we observe what works for our students, and that is our guideline. We use phonics instruction, word analysis, sight word recognition, and whole language. As a student once commented about my teaching style, “You do anything that works, short of standing on your head.”

I am able to follow this general approach to student learning because the school respects the teachers’ abilities to choose the methods and materials that are most effective for our individual teaching styles. With private funding sources, Fatiha, Galina, and I have the freedom to exercise the methods that best serve our students without the burdens imposed on publicly funded teachers. We are accountable to our students and our sponsors. Our biannual progress reports to our sponsors testify to the results of our efforts.

During the current session, two more students took the oath of citizenship. In our one-room schoolhouse, we help each other achieve our dreams. As our students often say, “In America, all things are possible.”

Kathleen Klose teaches ESOL literacy and theater at the Immigrant Learning Center in Malden, Massachusetts, in the United States.
A wealth of anecdotal evidence from practitioners suggests that second language acquisition (SLA) is best supported by the use of clearly structured pair work or small-group tasks. However, within the Vygotskian concept of social constructivism, the field of sociolinguistics remains a much understudied field of classroom research.

One explanation for this dearth of research is the manner in which neo-Vygotskian second language (L2) studies have been restricted by the narrow purview of mainstream research. Against this backdrop, Gebhard (1999) argues for a “sociocultural perspective” that takes as a starting point “an understanding that the origin and structure of cognition are rooted in the daily social and cultural practices in which an individual participates” (p. 544). Although a few mainstream journals publish articles that focus on the sociolinguistic approach, studies that robustly investigate social context, power, and identity remain relatively difficult to locate.

The crucial question is: Do practitioners really understand why and how peer interaction facilitates (or frustrates) language acquisition from a sociocultural perspective?

The Sociocultural Research Perspective

Classroom practice has evolved rapidly since the importance of peer interaction was acknowledged at the 1972 International Communication Association convention, which focused on interaction and learning. The benefits of peer interaction across the curriculum have been compellingly expressed (see, e.g., Johnson & Johnson, 1996). Consequently, teachers are structuring their teaching methods to engage students in communicative tasks by arranging them into small groups or pairs. Using the term cooperative learning groups, Johnson and Johnson list the following benefits of peer interaction:

- positive independence
- individual accountability
- face-to-face promotive interactions
- appropriate use of interpersonal and small-group skills and group processing

Such learning arrangements act as powerful catalysts for higher achievement, more positive relationships among students, and greater psychological health. Classroom discourse has been recognized as a complex sociocultural activity in which meaning making is an integral process in the creation of the social identity of learners. Theorists and practitioners alike almost unanimously emphasise a communicative framework of one kind or another. Thinking comes along as a necessary element of this process. The form and functions of thought arise from social context; therefore, human thought can be described as fundamentally social in its origin.

The internalisation of experience arising from social interaction is crucial to a person’s understanding of his or her role as a participant in a postmodern society typified by states of flux, dynamic change, and complex uncertainties. As Eisner and Peshkin (1990) observe, “whether we are talking about unicorns, quarks, infinity, or apples, our cognitive life depends on experience” (p. 31). In the microcosm of the classroom, and in the smaller collective of the group or pair, this observation is also true.

Many foundation studies have demonstrated that interaction is essential if effective learning is to take place. It is therefore inevitable that even a perfunctory search on SLA and interaction reveals a
proliferation of research that avers the notion that language is acquired due to interaction between the learner and a more proficient speaker. Long and Porter (1985) have summarised the main pedagogical arguments in favour of a collaborative learning framework as the following:

- increasing opportunities for language practice
- assisting in the individualisation of instruction
- advancing the quality and quantity of student talk
- encouraging a positive affective environment
- increasing the students’ motivation to learn

It is worth remembering that although Vygotsky’s most productive years at Moscow’s Institute of Psychology were between 1924 and 1935, the most often cited text on his theories, *Mind and Society*, did not become accessible to a mass international readership until 1978. Furthermore, Vygotsky’s work, although enormously influential, is limited by a focus on novice–expert interactions. Consequently, it has only been in relatively recent years that the potential benefits of peer interactions have become widely acknowledged.

**Pedagogical Implications of Sociolinguistic Research**

A particularly interesting foundation study that takes a sociolinguistic perspective on peer interaction and informs L2 practice was conducted by Porter (1986). This study contrasted native speaker–native speaker, native speaker–nonnative speaker, and nonnative speaker–nonnative speaker interactions based on grammatical accuracy, interactional features, and sociolinguistic appropriateness of the input between a variety of such dyads. Porter found that there was no clear advantage in having a native speaker as an input provider because input from a nonnative speaker could be just as comprehensible as input from a native speaker.

Porter (1986) also found few indications that nonnative speakers frustrate SLA by giving each other miscorrections and error incorporations. Numerous studies seek to illustrate how learning takes place in social settings by analysing the discourse for evidence of collective scaffolding. The essential outcome of such research is the fundamental understanding that social or group construction of new knowledge achieves much better learning outcomes than the individual internalisation of knowledge.

Ohta (1995) undertook a study on complex linguistic problems and found that peer dyads displayed greater linguistic accuracy than did tasks fronted by the teacher. She also observed that the sociocultural roles of expert and novice alternated between the participants. Ohta’s findings support the proposition that structured pair work enables learners to acquire language by sharing their strengths in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978).

Storch’s (2002) study is a rare example of robust research that clearly illustrates how a sociolinguistic approach to language learning may create measurable increases in performance. She analysed transcripts of student discourse by looking for significant features exhibited by pairs of pretested learners who had passed either the university threshold level of 6.5 on the International English Language Testing System or 570–580 on the Test of English as a Foreign Language. The similarity between the students’ proficiency levels made it possible for the participants to self-select their partners.

Storch (2002) observed four distinct patterns of interaction: collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, and expert/novice (see A Model of Dyadic Interaction). She points out that a collaborative relationship means much more than two or more learners working together. From the
arguably deeper perspective of sociolinguistics, students take on collaborative roles in an interaction when they assist each other equally while attempting to solve a particular linguistic challenge or problem. For this reason, the word collaborative in all its forms has been avoided here unless it meets Storch’s definition in terms of a collaborative relationship.

Storch (2002) blended her framework with the notion of equality and mutuality discussed by Damon and Phelps (1989). Equality is defined as the level of authority or control over the task; pairs exhibiting a high level of equality have the ability to take direction from each other. Mutuality means the extent of engagement between each other’s contributions; pairs that exhibit a high level of mutuality share ideas and give reciprocal feedback. As one would expect, the collaborative quadrant in the Model of Dyadic Interaction is characterised by both high mutuality and high equality.

Storch (2002) found that students who worked collaboratively learnt more than pairs who were observed adhering to any of the other three patterns of interaction. Expert/novice relationships of the Vygotskian type also performed well, but less so than their collaborative counterparts. This suggests that the existence of high mutuality in peer interactions is more important than a relationship that emphasises high equality. If one interprets the terms expert, novice, and collaborative to refer to different levels of knowing and comprehension, then these components become cognitive elements. When applying this interpretation, it is to be expected that pairs exhibiting cognition-type relationships (those dedicated to acquiring and transmitting knowledge) will show evidence of better learning.

The essential pedagogical point arising from Storch’s (2002) findings is that teachers should be acutely aware of how the different social roles and subsequent relationships arising from classroom interactions facilitate or frustrate learning processes as well as outcomes. The highly effective language teacher will create conditions in which dyads and groups experience learning relationships typified by positive corrections, positive confirmations, completion of their partner’s sentences, and direct clarifying questions.

**References**


Colby Toussaint Clark is a teacher in the United States and is currently continuing her research into sociocultural learning interactions at Portland State University, in Oregon, in the United States.

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Encounters Book 1

Making lessons more applicable to the lives of students has become prevalent in today’s language classrooms. An increasing number of English language teaching texts aim to relate to students’ interests in some form in order to help encourage and sustain the desire to learn a new language. Encounters Book 1, which uses a reality-focused approach, presents standard content in a way that is different enough to offer an alternative to the same textbook that one might use repeatedly in class. It is aimed at false beginners (students with about an 800-word vocabulary but very little grammatical structure; Helgesen, 1987; Peaty, 1987; Richards, Platt, & Weber, 1985; Ur, 1985) or students at the lower intermediate level, and it can be used and adapted easily for learners in high school, college, or adult education.

The color photos, diagrams, and cartoons strike a good balance between seriousness and fun while also providing useful lesson points and language. And the book is accompanied by a corresponding CD that contains the dialogues used for the listening exercises in the text. Therefore, Encounters Book 1 has the potential to keep students actively participating in class and effectively learning the skills that are presented.

Encounters Book 1 gradually increases in difficulty and introduces students to basic conversation situations such as greetings and introductions, stating and resolving problems, and giving opinions. What makes this book particularly useful is that its chapters mimic an actual conversation and build on each prior chapter so that students learn to greet each other, start and continue a conversation, then give opinions, and, finally, say goodbye. This way, students can role-play at different stages throughout the book.

The following principles are important to help understand how Encounters Book 1 can be used in an oral communication class. First, the text highlights possible new words with a red highlighted number. Second, the text provides students with helpful advice so that their speech is natural, concentrating on openings and closings that are native-like. Third, learners are given ample opportunities to perform their conversations based on the lesson within the Role Plays section of each chapter. A full lesson can take up to 130 minutes in one class session, or it can be adapted and spread across two classes, especially if the Role Plays section takes up most of the second class.

The students in my high school, university, and adult education classes all have responded well to Encounters Book 1. It provides a good alternative to the usual ESOL texts because it presents material in a slightly different yet equally appropriate way, which is sure to energize any classroom context in which it is used.

References

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Pragmatics


I had been looking for a simple book to introduce pragmatics to novice students who will teach EFL. Fortunately, I came across the workbook Pragmatics, which explains technical concepts clearly and simply, and teaches through hands-on language analysis. Combining theoretical knowledge with clear examples in different real-world situations, the book is a good starting point for all students.

With the use of intriguing examples, chapter 1 explores the relationship among linguistics, semantics, and pragmatics. Consider this example from the first page of the book:

A little boy comes in the front door.
Mother: Wipe your feet please.
He removes his muddy shoes and socks and carefully wipes his clean feet on the doormat.

According to Peccei, the child’s knowledge of vocabulary and grammar does not appear to be the problem. The problem is that the child appears to have understood what the words mean, but not what his mother meant. In the same vein, semantics concentrates on meaning that comes from purely linguistic knowledge, whereas pragmatics concentrates on those aspects of knowledge that can-
not be predicted by linguistic knowledge alone and focuses on the meaning of the speaker’s utterance by considering physical and social worlds.

In chapters 2–9, some of the basic techniques and key concepts of pragmatics (e.g., Grice’s Maxims, speech act theory, felicity conditions) are discussed. Chapter 10 provides learners with ideas and guidelines for conducting short research projects involving pragmatics analysis.

In each of the book’s 10 chapters, after some explanation, there is an exercise accompanied by a comment; answers to the exercises are provided at the end of the book. There is also a summary at the end of each chapter. In addition to the exercises in each chapter, all of the units provide useful supplementary exercises and discussion questions that require more independent work. Answers are not provided in these sections, so students may find it helpful to discuss their answers with each other.

The book’s bibliography also is helpful because some titles are marked by an asterisk (*). Peccei explains that these references are particularly suitable for learners who are new to the study of pragmatics.

Even though Pragmatics is comparatively short at 96 pages, it brings together a number of important issues. I highly recommend this book as a general introduction to this field, especially because of its clear, user-friendly structure.

Azadeh Nemati is a faculty member at Jahrom Azad University, in Iran, and a PhD candidate in TEFL at the University of Mysore, in India.

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**QualityTime-ESL: The Digital Resource Book**


This is a digital book, so you read it on a computer. When Raynaud mentions an exercise or activity, you just click on the hyperlink, and the file opens on your screen. The Document Annex includes a catalogue of more than 1,500 ready-to-use documents. Listening comprehension exercises are MP3 files for use in the classroom, in computer labs, or on digital music players such as iPods. All text documents are in A4 format and may be freely photocopied for use in the classroom. Many of them also are Microsoft Word files and thus can be customized to suit the needs of each institution.

Samples of students’ written work; Microsoft PowerPoint presentations by students; and excerpts of films written, directed, and produced by Raynaud’s students should motivate students around the world to carry out similar projects for presentation in their English classes.

Although some exercises are designed for science students at universities where English is compulsory, most of the materials are appropriate for any advanced-level English language learners age 16 and older. Other materials can be used with any level, from preintermediate to advanced, and are particularly useful in multilevel classes.

QualityTime-ESL is the result of Raynaud’s 24 years at Institut National Polytechnique, in Grenoble, France, teaching in three engineering schools. Her intensive English course became well known partly because all of her students scored at least 750 on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC); many scored over 850 and even 900. In addition to performing well on the TOEIC, the students would speak enthusiastically of the progress they had made in just a short period, speaking solely in English in class. Raynaud likes to use exercises that optimize class participation and customize teaching to suit the needs of the students without having to spend hours preparing.

QualityTime-ESL is written as a series of interviews with Raynaud, who has just retired and wishes to pass on her ESL teaching expertise. These interviews are conducted by a new virtual member of her team, who asks all the usual pertinent questions that teachers have about topics such as motivation, guidance, discipline, and evaluation. Raynaud discusses her teaching philosophy and the techniques she has used over the years, including tutorials, personalized interviews, professional presentations, teamwork, effective testing, intensive pair work, interactivity, computerized review sheets, and much more.

The content in Quality Time-ESL is varied and timeless. Furthermore, its emphasis on global English makes it interesting for teachers in a variety of settings around the world. I have used this digital resource book both as a source of teaching materials and as inspiration to implement methods that truly help students gain fluency in spoken English. What is unique about this book is the way it helps teachers put together their own personalized courses.

I have learned a great deal from working with such an inspiring teacher as Raynaud, and I am happy to have all these examples of her work to use in my classes.

Grace Willson is an English professor at the University of Joseph Fourier, in France.
How can I teach English language development, content area subject matter, and reading? This is a question that many ESOL teachers ask themselves daily. With the push for language through content, ESOL teachers are having to become content area and reading specialists overnight, which can be especially challenging for educators with limited resources, teaching space, and time. But help can be found at Reading A-Z, which provides access to a plethora of literacy resources for an annual membership fee of $79 for use in up to nine classrooms.

Specially geared toward students in Grades K–8, this Web site offers resources that could easily be adapted for high school students and adults. Leveled readers, reader’s theater scripts, fiction, nonfiction, wordless books, and comic books are just a few of the available resources. These resources are divided into 26 lettered categories that progress from easiest to most difficult—literally, an a-to-z classification. The books can be downloaded, printed, and folded for use, making the reading material highly instructional. Students can highlight or circle text and write notes or word lists in the margins.

What makes this site particularly helpful is the variety of nonfiction content area topics, including biographical books about Marco Polo, Amelia Earhart, and César Chávez, to name just a few. The leveled readers make the content accessible to students with lower reading ability while engaging them with high-interest topics. For example, while teaching a reading class at a community college, I used Reading A-Z’s book The Legacy of da Vinci, which provides interesting facts about the artist’s life. My students and I were able to have critical discussions about the book and then watch the movie The Da Vinci Code, which was in theaters at the time. I had two nursing students in that same class, and to help the other students learn more about their course of study, we read Influenza, a Reading A-Z book about the flu.

I also used Reading A-Z when I worked as an elementary school teacher, and I noticed that my students’ favorite read-alouds were the reader’s theater scripts. One year we read “The Three Little Pigs” countless times, with everyone wanting to read the part of the wolf, probably because he had the most speaking parts. To witness second-grade English language learners wanting to read aloud, not embarrassed about their accents or pronunciation, helps us as teachers remember why we teach.

The assessment page of Reading A-Z provides accessible and easy-to-understand information about reading concepts such as comprehension, fluency, and phonemic awareness for teachers who do not have in-depth training in this area. One suggestion, though: If you have a limited supply of paper, you may be at a disadvantage in terms of getting the most out of this Web site. However, this can be overcome by reusing books that you are able to print; using recycled paper for printing; or limiting the amount of paper needed by printing Reading A-Z’s smaller “pocketbooks,” which require half the amount of paper as the other books and fit in your pocket.

I recommend using Reading A-Z to complement your English language development program. It is well worth it.

Ayanna Cooper is an instructional coach of English language learners with the Dekalb County School District, in Atlanta, Georgia, in the United States.

See also “Reader’s Theater for Reading Improvement,” http://www.tesol.org/let/.
On June 18, 2008, 13 TESOL members representing 12 U.S.-based affiliates met in Washington, DC, for TESOL Advocacy Day 2008. The third such event held by TESOL, the day featured issue briefings and workshops, capped by members visiting congressional offices on Capitol Hill. The goal of Advocacy Day was not only to lobby on key issues for TESOL, but also to provide an interactive learning experience for affiliate representatives focused on elements of advocacy. By the end of the day, TESOL members had visited more than 40 representatives and senators.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is scheduled to go through a legislative renewal, or reauthorization, during the 110th Congress. Because of the dramatic impact that NCLB has had on the education of English language learners in the United States and because of the many critical issues stemming from its implementation, TESOL Advocacy Day 2008 was focused exclusively on this law.

With guidance from TESOL, participants set up their own individual meetings with these key members of Congress. Participants received talking points and background information on the topics they would be addressing so that they could begin to familiarize themselves with the issues in advance. To help make their congressional meetings more effective, participants were encouraged to find examples from their own states and districts to illustrate the talking points.

TESOL Advocacy Day commenced with a welcome from TESOL President Shelley Wong. The participants were also joined by President-Elect Mark Algren and Past President Sandy Briggs. The morning workshop was led by John Segota, TESOL’s advocacy and professional relations manager, and comprised three briefings. The first featured congressional staff from both the House and the Senate discussing the “view from the Hill” on NCLB reauthorization and the key issues under debate. The second briefing featured the education staffer from Sen. Barack Obama’s office discussing a bill on middle school reform that the senator has proposed, Success in the Middle Act. In the final briefing, the acting director of the Office of English Language Acquisition provided an update from that office.

“I have a much clearer idea on their role in Washington, DC, mine as a member of TESOL, and how all of us can work together.”

Following these briefings, an interactive workshop was held on how to have an effective meeting with one’s congressional representative. This workshop was led by Ellen Fern and Krista Heckler of Washington Partners, LLC, who serve as TESOL’s legislative consultants. Participants were provided with key information to prepare for their meetings and given the opportunity to role-play. The purpose of the briefings and the workshop was to help the participants practice and prepare for their meeting on Capitol Hill that afternoon.

The afternoon was set aside for individual meetings with members of Congress. Participants were required to set up three individual meetings with members of Congress identified by TESOL, though some took the initiative to set up more. Although most participants met with key congressional staff, some had the opportunity to meet with their members of Congress directly. Those who did not get a chance to meet directly with their representatives were not disappointed; members of Congress depend on their staff, so in speaking to the appropriate aide, participants knew they had the ear of the representative.

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To maximize the impact of TESOL Advocacy Day, key members of Congress serving on the education committees in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives were identified for meetings. In turn, affiliates representing the constituencies of those members of Congress were selected and invited to send a representative to Advocacy Day.

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Over dinner at the end of the day, all of the participants shared their experiences and what they had learned. They all agreed that, overall, this event was a very positive experience for them and for TESOL.

“TESOL Advocacy Day 2008 was an absolutely fantastic event!” exclaimed Jory Samkoff-Oulhiad, who represented NUTESOL/NIBE. “I participated in the first TESOL Advocacy Day in 2006, and this event has come so far in such a short time. It was well organized, and I was well prepared with all the information sent out ahead of time.”

All participants were provided with materials about the event to take back to their affiliates, including information sheets on the issues and grassroots advocacy tips. In addition, the participants agreed to share the experience with their affiliates through their affiliate newsletters and Web sites.

More information about TESOL Advocacy Day, including additional photos and videos of the event, is available on the TESOL Web site. If you are interested in learning more about your congressional representatives and the legislative issues that TESOL is tracking, go to the TESOL U.S. Advocacy Action Center at http://capwiz.com/tesol.

Addressing Global Concerns: The TESOL Global Professional Issues Committee

The Global Professional Issues Committee (GPIC), a standing committee on policy, was formed in August 2006 with seven members from around the world (Pakistan, Venezuela, Russia, China, Italy, Croatia, and Canada). The committee, focused specifically on addressing worldwide issues and trends, complements TESOL’s U.S.-oriented advocacy and helps advance TESOL’s global initiatives.

As a global entity, TESOL’s mission includes increasing the association’s awareness of issues that affect the field of English language learning and teaching worldwide. TESOL is also interested in increasing its effectiveness in dealing with these issues to the furthest extent possible, considering political and cultural implications and restrictions.

The GPIC is currently developing the TESOL Survey on Global Issues in English Language Teaching, with a more widespread dissemination than its initial pilot survey, to go out to professionals worldwide. After analyzing the results, the committee will recommend action in the area of professional development to the TESOL Board of Directors. The GPIC’s goal is to pinpoint specific needs in particular regions and provide recommendations to the TESOL Board on how TESOL can address the needs of the field.

In addition to the survey project, the GPIC periodically reviews and revises existing TESOL position statements and resolutions, and drafts new statements to reflect a more global perspective for TESOL.
Spotlight on TESOL Communities: Growing Recognition: The New Nonnative English Speakers in TESOL Interest Section

TESOL’s newest interest section, the Nonnative English Speakers in TESOL (NNEST) Interest Section, begins with an established history. It has its roots in the NNEST Caucus, proposed by George Braine in 1996 and founded in 1998. The caucus’s overarching goal at that time was to create a positive professional identity for nonnative-English-speaking teachers by building a community that would provide advocacy for them, emphasize the benefits that they bring to English language teaching, foster their leadership development, and support caucus members’ efforts to publish.

A decade later, the caucus had more than 1,700 primary members. CATESOL and WATESOL had nonnative English speaker entities in their governance, and NNEST Caucus members were active in TESOL leadership, including several who served as TESOL Board members—most notably Jun Liu, TESOL’s first non-native-English-speaking president (2006–2007). Even more significant was the caucus’s contribution to the creation of an entirely new field of research: nonnative-English-speaking teacher studies. The seminal work in this field is usually identified as Péter Medgyes’s 1994 text, The Non-Native Teacher. Today, five major anthologies are either in print or in press, and more than 200 articles related to issues in this field have been published. The 2008 TESOL convention in New York saw more than 25 presentations related to nonnative-English-speaking teachers, and numerous unpublished dissertations and theses have examined related concerns.

Due in large part to this robust research growth, when the TESOL Board announced the dissolution of caucuses this year, the path was clear: apply for interest section status. The application was approved at the June Board meeting, and the NNEST Interest Section was formed.

As nonnative-English-speaking teachers have achieved the recognition that they sought, in their careers and in the TESOL organization, there has been a change in both the outreach and the research focus of the entity. Outreach today is less about discrimination (although certainly this is still a concern) and more about working across specializations and coming to terms with English as a lingua franca. Current research focuses less on how nonnative-English-speaking teachers are perceived and looks more to professional issues such as effective classroom practices and appropriate professional development in local EFL settings.

The NNEST Interest Section actively welcomes native-as well as nonnative-English-speaking TESOL members. It intends to continue the NNEST Caucus traditions of actively supporting members’ publication efforts and preparing them for leadership roles. Looking ahead, its aim is to be at the forefront of research on English and English language teaching in a world where English is used by many—and in many different ways.

For more information on the NNEST Interest Section, please visit http://www.tesol.org: Communities: Interest Sections: Nonnative English Speakers in TESOL.

Caucus Transition Update

The approved transition of caucuses to forums was completed as of July 31, 2008. Forums are described as independent, informal groups. They may be organized to conduct specific, defined activities at each TESOL annual convention or on their own without any activities associated with TESOL. Forums share common social, cultural, or demographic identities; they are different from interest sections (ISs), which share specific professional interests. At the 2009 annual convention, eight forums will have a presence through hosting booths, social meetings, and academic sessions. Forms to apply for forum status are available at http://www.tesol.org/forums.

Caucuses also had the option of applying to become ISs. In June 2008, the TESOL Board of Directors voted to approve the Nonnative English Speakers in TESOL (NNEST) Caucus’s transition to an IS.

Members of the former NNEST Caucus will need to rejoin NNEST as an IS. To join the new NNEST IS, and to review your ISs, go to the TESOL Web site, log in, and click on the My Communities link on the left.

Member Directory Enhanced

A new search option has recently been added to the TESOL Member Directory. Members may now search for other members by area of expertise. This option may be used to find someone to use as a speaker, to write an article, to discuss a topic on an e-list, and so on. Members self-select what they view as their own areas of expertise. TESOL does not represent or endorse the accuracy, reliability, or quality of the information provided by members.

To use the Member Directory, log on at www.tesol.org (username is your ID number; password is your last name unless you have changed it), then click on Communities, and scroll to Member Directory. The Area of Expertise category has been added to the Search by Category section.

Board Approves New Position Statement

At its recent meeting, the Board of Directors approved a new position statement on the status of the TESOL profession. The full text of TESOL’s Position Statement on the Status of, and Professional Equity for, the Field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages is available for download at www.tesol.org/positionstatements.
A Resource Center for TESOL Educators

TESOL educators often contact the Central Office to find out how they can find resources for their classes or where they can access papers on various topics. The answer to these questions is the TESOL Resource Center (TRC).

The TRC (www.tesol.org/resourcecenter) is a Web page that was created in response to the diverse needs of TESOL practitioners and is designed to promote the use of educational technology. After a year of intensive planning and designing, it went live and is now a platform where members can access and explore a variety of tools and resources. The TRC offers the opportunity for users to

- access many classroom materials
- access papers and presentations
- expand professional knowledge
- publish resources online
- receive recognition for contributing
- participate in annual TRC contests

The TRC main page has four sections: Find a Resource, Submit a Resource, Review a Resource, and the TRC Contest. To access resources, members need to use their TESOL ID and password to log in.

Resources

The resources on the TRC are varied in type and topic. They include resources for both classroom and professional development purposes. The TRC is constantly expanding and will continuously offer new types of resources. For example, some of TESOL's convention papers and video clips of all of the 2008 convention plenary speeches have been added to the site.

Once logged in, finding and accessing resources can be done easily by using the Find a Resource section. You can search and browse resources by type, audience, level, skills, content and subject matter, geographical relevance, and interest sections. You can also view a comprehensive list of all posted resources. Because each resource is submitted using a template, every resource posted on the TRC has a similar format for ease of use, and each posting lists the basic necessary information about the type of resource.

Submission and Review

Under the Submit a Resource section, you can find information and forms pertaining to submission and copyright (contributors retain copyright for their resources).

The resources currently posted on the TRC include the following:

- lesson plans
- activities
- assessment tools
- teaching tips
- papers and articles
- presentations and multimedia resources
- Web links and software

Contests

The last section of the TRC site is the Contest section. TRC contests give contributors a chance to win 2 nights’ free accommodation during the TESOL convention. To participate in the contest, members must submit at least two approved resources during the year. Last year, the contest enabled one TESOL member to attend the annual convention for the first time; she found the TRC contest to be excellent encouragement. Second-prize winners receive credit toward TESOL publications. All contest participants receive TESOL’s Certificate of Appreciation.

Visit the TRC

In just a short time, the TRC has proven to be a valued and popular benefit of TESOL membership. On average, the TRC receives 844 hits per week. TESOL continues to work hard to improve the TRC and expand its resources, and welcomes members’ suggestions and involvement in the growth of this benefit.

Visit the TRC at www.tesol.org/resourcecenter. Use the resources in your classrooms or for your own professional development. Recommend the TRC to your peers, and join the many members who have contributed to this professional activity by submitting and reviewing resources.

Minoo Asdjodi
TESOL Education Projects Manager
resourcecenter@tesol.org
Forging a Path Toward TESOL Leadership: TESOL Awards

Looking back at the TESOL awards archives through the years, I came across the names of TESOL award winners who are current and former members of the TESOL Board of Directors, chairs of committees, TESOL presidents, and current and past leaders in TESOL in various capacities. Many of the recipients I’ve spoken with have told me that winning a TESOL award was the first step in becoming involved in the organization and cultivating relationships that helped them grow and develop professionally.

This past year, I was the coordinator of the 2008 TESOL Leadership Mentoring Program Award and was involved in the process of finding future leaders for our association. The Leadership Mentoring Program is one of a few awards that require a nomination process as opposed to an application. A candidate must be nominated by a TESOL member, and the winners are then matched with individual mentors who help and guide them throughout the year. An impressive group of candidates was nominated this year, from which three terrific winners were chosen. The nominators and the mentors were all familiar names because of their high level of involvement in the association, and I was struck by the dedication of those who agreed to serve as mentors. Two were plenary speakers from the 2008 convention, and the third is a former TESOL president.

Most TESOL awards, though, are adjudicated through an application process. From the list and descriptions of the awards on the TESOL Web site, you can choose the award that you think you are most suited to win. Some come with a monetary prize and make convention attendance possible for members who might otherwise not be able to attend. For example, the TESOL/TEFL Travel Grant is specifically for TESOL members outside of the United States and Canada; TESOL provides each winner with US$2,500 for convention-related expenses. Although you must be a TESOL member to apply for these, you may be eligible for a reduced global membership fee depending on your country of origin.

The Awards Committee is happy to announce a new travel grant generously supported by Betty Azar. The Professional Development Travel Grant for Practicing ESL/EFL Teachers offers grants to teachers and teacher trainers who need financial support to attend the annual convention. This year, we hope to award 10 recipients US$1,500 each to enable them to attend the 2009 TESOL convention in Denver, Colorado, in the United States.

No more excuses! Take the time to nominate someone or to apply yourself for a TESOL award. November 1, 2008, is the deadline. Refer to the Awards & Grants page in the Career section of the TESOL Web site to view the entire list of awards and grants: http://www.tesol.org/awards.

Rosemary Orlando
Chair, TESOL Awards Standing Committee

2008 TESOL Academy
The 2008 TESOL Academy was held at Roosevelt University, in Chicago, Illinois, in the United States, June 20–21. The academy featured seven 10-hour workshops with a particular emphasis on the professional development needs of K–12 ESL educators. The academy attracted 114 ESOL professionals from around the United States.

Karyn Niles led the workshop “Teaching Reading Across Content Areas” to a group of teachers at the TESOL Academy, Roosevelt University, Chicago, IL, USA, June 20–21, 2008.

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(Editors, David Hayes and Judy Sharkey)

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The contributors to this volume used creative approaches to breathe life into outdated or underdeveloped curricula for school-age English language learners. Through collaborative work with students, other teachers, administrators, and researchers, the contributors enhanced English learning through language arts, math, technology, and other subject areas.

To order, visit the Bookstore at http://www.tesol.org/
2008 Symposia  The TESOL Symposium on Keeping Language Diversity Alive

On July 9, 2008, 95 participants gathered at the Alice Spring Convention Centre, in Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia, for the TESOL Symposium on Keeping Language Diversity Alive. The featured speakers were Joseph Lo Bianco, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia; Stephen May, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand; and Veronica Dobson, Alice Springs, Northern Territory, Australia. The closing session was led by Michael Christie, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia.

(from left to right) Michael Christie; Veronica Dobson; Misty Adoniou, President, Australian Council of TESOL Associations; Shelley Wong, President, TESOL; Stephen May; Joseph Lo Bianco

Veronica Dobson during the morning introductory presentation

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