The Outsider in Jamaica
By Mary Hills Kuck

To Understand Diverse Learners, Leave Your Comfort Zone
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Growing Better Readers
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An Interview With Keith Folse

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This final expanded issue of Essential Teacher is a cornucopia of treasures in which we include four more articles than usual from authors around the world. Also, we are thrilled to feature interviews with two special guests, Keith Folse and Jim Cummins, who share their perspectives on the role of grammar teaching in mainstream classrooms and the direction of English language teaching and learning.

• **Communities of Practice:** Judie Haynes focuses on teaching for reading comprehension with strategies that make good readers. Linda New Levine remembers the teachers who served as her mentors and role models. Debbie Zacarian asks illuminating questions about how ESL classes should be structured. Ke Xu dedicates his column to the 35th anniversary of TESOL’s EFL Interest Section. Alvino Fantini makes an important distinction between naturalistic and classroom learning of another language. Dorothy Zemach uses the metaphor of a mystery book to investigate the complexities of classroom teaching.

• **Out of the Box editor Linda Gerena has compiled a unique assortment of articles:** Mary Hills Kuck shares her views on her unique role as a welcomed foreigner, and long-time resident, in Jamaica, where learning to speak Creole does not automatically earn you full entrance into the country’s culture. San Shwe Baw recalls using a controversial story as a springboard for numerous language learning activities. Chad Low describes how he used a concept of Mikhail Bakhtin’s to minimize a new student’s social distance and anxiety. Okon Effiong writes about how a personal stage performance in a second language led to an engaging classroom activity that uses a bit of the first language to encourage development of the second language. Paul Halman discusses the complex dynamics of work relationships between native-English-speaking teachers and their Korean counterparts in South Korea.

• **Portal editor Susanne Lapp presents the latest on classroom initiatives and learning projects:** Roberta Weber and Thomas Doyal discuss the various benefits of study-abroad programs for prospective and current teachers of diverse populations. Wendy Church and Lauren McClanahan take readers to Kwigillingok, Alaska, where high school students with various levels of English proficiency increase their literacy skills while exploring the effects of climate change in their own backyards. Joshua Cohen describes a meaning-focused activity that incorporates student-generated minisurveys. Inspired by Greg Mortenson’s work building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Sally Cummings successfully connects a charitable project with students’ research, learning, and action. James Nagle discusses the benefits and outcomes of an innovative collaboration between a middle school and the preservice teachers from a nearby college. Ali Fuad Selvi suggests a comprehensive set of guidelines for graduate TESOL students to use to create an equitable teaching and learning environment for ESOL teachers of diverse linguistic backgrounds.

• **References & Resources editor Vanessa Caceres offers a variety of reviews of popular publications:** Holly Hansen-Thomas reviews a rich resource for anyone involved in the education of English language learners (ELLs) in the United States. Vander Viana and Luciana do Amaral Teixeira present an overview of a Web site that collects the front pages of newspapers from around the globe. Hui-jung Tang presents a comprehensive book on social interaction and its effect on language development. Baburhan Uzum discusses a university-level text that prepares ESL students for learning academic content.

• **Compleat Links editor Maria Coady presents excellent articles that complement selections from the print issue:** Joshua Miekley discusses writing grant proposals as a service-based communicative activity with adult ELLs in Kosovo. Diana Booth shares the benefits of using wikis for projects in the classroom. Michele Harr tells the story of how kickball bridged the gap between an isolated learner and his teacher. Philomena Marinaccio-Eckel and Jaclyn Donahue share their approach to teaching metacognitive strategies to ELLs in order to improve oral reading comprehension. Keith Folse extends his thoughts about grammar. As always, Richard Firsten continues to clarify the perplexities of grammar.

And on a happy note, I am pleased to report an update to Connie Johnson’s article from the June 2009 issue of ET (“EFL and the Deaf: Teachers Making a Difference”). In response to her article, administrators at her university (Universidad de las Americas, Puebla) graciously donated a computer to her community service school for the deaf, so students can now enjoy visual input through computer programs. On behalf of all of us at Essential Teacher, present and past, editors and columnists, I thank you for your continuous support, contributions, comments, and feedback. I wish you much success and a fond farewell.

Best always,
Eileen N. Whelan Ariza
TESOL Journal is Now Accepting Online Submissions!

TESOL Journal (TJ) is a refereed, practitioner-oriented electronic journal based on current theory and research in the field of TESOL. It is a forum for second and foreign language educators at all levels to engage in the ways that research and theorizing can inform, shape, and ground teaching practices and perspectives. Articles enable an active and vibrant professional dialogue about research- and theory-based practices as well as practice-oriented theorizing and research.

TJ is actively seeking authors to submit previously unpublished articles. Go to www.tesol.org/TJ for details about the journal; submission guidelines; and an interview with the editor, Margo DelliCarpini.

Submit online at www.editorialmanager.com/TJ
U.S. inventor and statesman Benjamin Franklin wrote that the only two certainties in life are
death and taxes. I think one other item could be added to his parsimonious list: change. Ranging
from subtle and slight to forceful and pervasive, change surrounds us—and the nimble adapt
and thrive.

TESOL is continually assessing its publications and member benefits to ensure that they meet
members’ changing needs. This edition of Essential Teacher closes a chapter of our publication his-
tory. ET has filled a niche for our members, and I thank the editorial board for their dedication
and excellent work. We have enjoyed reading this magazine for the past several years, and it will
be missed. However, with the conclusion of ET come many new and exciting publication changes,
and you can read in detail about these changes on p. 60 of the Association News section.

In these rapidly changing times, TESOL continues to thrive, and its value as an association
remains strong. At the June 2009 Advocacy Day event in Washington, D.C., I was again reminded of
the importance of our position papers, which give voice to the association’s stance on a variety of
issues. These statements speak forcefully and eloquently to those both inside and outside our field,
and policy makers look to them for guidance.

TESOL provides a vast networking capacity for its members. The interest sections—all 21 of
them—each sponsor a discussion list, and you’re welcome to participate in as many as you wish.
The annual convention presents an unparalleled opportunity not only to renew relationships but to
forge new ones. We TESOLers are a friendly bunch, and it doesn’t require much effort to strike up a
new friendship or open the doors of collegial cooperation.

TESOL also provides continuous and ongoing professional development. Through publications
(books and serials), education programs, the convention (see you in Boston!), and interest section
newsletters, your peers present research as well as practical applications to keep you abreast of the
latest developments in the field.

I encourage you to copy this page and share it with your colleagues who are not TESOL mem-
ers. Although the saying may be “the more, the merrier,” for us it is also “the more, the stronger.”
More members mean a more influential voice of advocacy, more powerful networks, more abundant
opportunities for learning from one another, and a stronger association.

Mark S. Algren
President, 2009–2010  president@tesol.org
In previous columns, I wrote about four reading comprehension strategies that help English language learners (ELLs) become better readers: making connections, visualizing, inferring, and asking questions. I discussed the advantages of reader’s workshop in helping ELLs learn to read in English. I especially recommend this kind of reading instruction because it involves ELLs (a) reading books that they have selected themselves from a library that are at their English language and reading levels, (b) gradually becoming more independent as readers, and (c) learning strategies that replicate reading environments outside of the classroom.

In this column I conclude my series on reading comprehension strategies by demonstrating how good readers determine the importance of information in a text and synthesize information.

Determining the importance of information in a text. Good readers can make a distinction between relevant and irrelevant information in nonfiction text. This ability is key to understanding the content area information that students must read. First, teachers should introduce the conventions of nonfiction text. Students should be taught to scan the book before reading in order to gain knowledge through reading chapter titles, headings, subheadings, picture captions, maps, glossaries, and indexes. ELLs need to understand that reading is not necessarily a front-of-the-book to back-of-the-book task. In my experience, they will try to memorize everything in a content area class so that they can pass the test, but without necessarily understanding or retaining what they have read. They give all details the same level of importance.

Let’s visit Ms. Meldonian’s class, where she is teaching a lesson about animal habitats to third-grade science students. Students in her class take a picture walk through a book on animal habitats before reading it. They learn to use the title, table of contents, bolded words, photographs, captions, headings, and labels to preview information. Ms. Meldonian goes through the chapter to preview the important information in the text. The ELLs in the class are therefore able to access information from the text that was above their reading level. Ms. Meldonian’s goal in her science class is to help ELLs access the same information as their native-English-speaking peers. Learning to distinguish essential from nonessential information in a text is an important skill for ELLs to learn.

Next, Ms. Meldonian explains the focus of the chapter and writes it on the chalkboard: “Animals live in many different habitats on earth.” After demonstrating what a habitat is, she teaches students that relevant information is related to the “big” idea. She gives several examples, and students practice deciding the importance of each fact. Ms. Meldonian then divides students into groups to brainstorm information that they learn from the textbook chapter. They make a list of the information they read. Students in each group take their list and write an R next to the facts they feel are relevant or important.

Ms. Meldonian makes a large T-chart to display the relevant and irrelevant facts for the whole class to see (see Information on Animal Habitats). Next, the whole class makes a group list of relevant and irrelevant information. ELLs in the class are able to participate because the vocabulary has been pre-taught, students work in small groups, and the activities are visual. Ms. Meldonian gives ELLs extra practice to understand which facts are important (relevant) and which are not important (irrelevant).

Summarizing information. Good readers know how to summarize important information and add their own schema to the information that they have learned. They take the new information...
tion and incorporate it into their schema. As they read, they carry on an internal conversation that includes what they understand or don’t understand, whether they agree or disagree, and what they wonder. Mrs. Wondra tells her second-grade students that there are two voices speaking when they read. The voice that they hear is their actual voice, and the other is the one inside their head. This inner voice helps them think about what they are reading.

When students in Mrs. Wondra’s class synthesize information, they do more than retell what they have read. They demonstrate understanding of the reading comprehension strategies that they have used. They retell the story from two points of view. One is based on their own experience that they bring to the reading. The other is based on the experiences of the story’s characters. True synthesis, however, involves that “Aha” moment (Harvey, 2002) that readers have when they really get the text.

Let’s listen to Mrs. Wondra as she teaches students to practice synthesizing information from a book that they have read. She has students work with a partner to read the text together. ELLs are paired with native English speakers. Each pair must decide how much of the text they will read before they stop and make comments about it. In this class, most pairs decide to stop after each paragraph.

At the end of each segment, they take turns sharing one comment about what they have read. Students think carefully about this comment because they are only allowed one at a time. After one student in the pair comments, the partner is allowed one response. Mrs. Wondra has already helped students learn language to use in making their comments, such as This reminds me of, I felt that, and I didn’t understand it when.

Synthesis is the culmination of many of the strategies that I have written about over the past 2 years in Essential Teacher. Synthesis cannot occur without understanding the key vocabulary in the text. It involves making connections to other parts of your life so that you find deeper meaning in a book. It entails making mental pictures of what is happening in the story and listening to the voice in your head. It includes asking questions about what we are reading. It also comprises the “Aha” moment that means you have achieved a deep understanding of what you have read. I hope that the columns that I have written on literacy and ELLs provide you with some “Aha” moments of your own.

judieh@optonline.net

HOME ROOM

The Teachers in the Room With Me

by Linda New Levine

Teaching can be a solitary profession. Traditional public school teachers in North America work in classrooms behind closed doors—just one teacher and a class of students. That’s how I was taught, and I didn’t question it at all when I began to teach in an inner-city junior high school. I walked into a room full of students and closed the door.

I might have kept that door closed for 30 years except that I realized early on that I really didn’t know how to teach at all. It was a frightening realization. Not only did I not know how to teach, but I also did not know how to control the class well enough so that I could try to teach. I needed help and fast.

Fortunately, there were wonderful teachers in my school who allowed me to spend free periods in their rooms observing their lessons. At first I didn’t know what to look for. How did Mr. Powers get his ninth-grade social studies class to behave when they were chatty and disruptive in my classroom? How did Mrs. Posner keep the attention and engage her diverse class of ninth-grade students in purposeful activities?

I couldn’t see what these teachers were doing to control students’ behavior because they had taught the students classroom routines early in the school year. Classes continued seamlessly because these experienced teachers had
We need professional attitudes and to develop a classroom culture of industry and success for all.

Eventually I learned how to develop classroom management skills that allowed me to actually teach. Mr. Powers and Mrs. Posner were in my classroom with me (if not in reality, at least in my inner thoughts) as I experimented with using proximity moves to silence a talkative student or engage a learner at the very earliest signs of inattention.

Even with good management in place, however, I became dissatisfied with my teaching. I was using methods that my teachers had used in classrooms with me many years before. They had worked for the all-girl parochial school classes I had attended, but they did not work in an inner-city school of racially and culturally diverse adolescents. Once again, I went back into other teachers’ classrooms searching for techniques that would help the students in my classes become successful learners.

I watched experienced science teachers conduct hands-on laboratory experiments in which every student was attentive and involved. Very quickly we discovered that we needed to teach these students how to read and write in a new language—a difficult job for any teacher, but especially for a teacher who didn’t know how to teach reading. I began to visit classrooms again, observing senior teachers and language arts consultants in whole-class and guided reading lessons. I attended TESOL conventions and sought out sessions that described literacy instruction for English language learners. I probed my graduate professors for ideas and searched for new materials from publishers’ representatives.

All of these people came back into my classroom with me, too. It was getting a little crowded in there by now, but my invisible collaborators provided the support I needed in a lonely and demanding profession.

After many years, I had developed professionally to the point at which I could mentor younger teachers. I went into their classrooms to coteach and discovered a whole new world of learning. The younger teachers in my school were wonderfully creative, hardworking, and purposeful in their instruction. I learned from them about content teaching techniques, cooperative learning strategies, student goal setting, and engaging parental support.

Now the doors were no longer closed in my school as staff worked together to plan, coteach, assess, form study groups, volunteer in homework clubs, and observe each other’s teaching. All of these young teachers came back into my room with me. There was more room there now because the door was wide open and we could spill out into the hallway when needed.

Collaborating with the teachers and school personnel in the back of my room helped me develop professionally and personally. What have I learned about collaboration as a form of professional development?

- We need to spend time together. This means getting out of our classrooms or departments, because norms of privacy in schools are counterproductive to teacher development.
- We need broad leadership expansion in schools—teams of teachers and administrators who are involved in higher level decision making.
- We need professional attitudes toward teaching, including the following:
  - respecting each other and tolerating our differences
  - sharing the research base on teaching strategies, comparing and analyzing it among ourselves
  - rewarding intellectual curiosity and a lifelong commitment to learning
  - operating as a school community with a common purpose

- We need leadership that supports teacher decision making and initiative, shared planning and observation time, material support, and training in collaborative teamwork.
- Most important, we need to recognize that good teachers develop over a period of time spent reflecting, analyzing, and comparing within a framework of institutional support that is founded in research on the knowledge and skills of teaching. (Levine, 2005)

I’m thankful to all of those teachers in the room with me for supporting me in this process.

Reference

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Amid’s family moved three times during their first year in the United States. Each time, Amid enrolled in a different high school. In each of the three districts, he was identified as a beginning-level English language learner (ELL). In the first district, he was assigned to an ESL class that met for 1 hour twice a week. In the second district, he was assigned to an ESL class that met each day for 45 minutes. In the third district, his ESL class met for 2 hours every day. The differences among the three districts’ ESL classes were not confined to the amount of time that Amid spent in them.

In the first district, where he had ESL class twice a week for an hour, his classmates were students with varying levels of English proficiency. The class, a group of 19 students, met in a small learning center. The room was located just off the hallway from the school administrators’ office and next door to the small group room used for students who were remanded to internal suspension for offenses committed while in school.

When Amid entered this ESL class, he was given an audiobook with accompanying worksheets to complete. His teacher rotated among the various students in class and observed their progress with the assigned work. The class was quiet, and Amid devoted all of his time to trying, unsuccessfully, to complete the assigned worksheets. He would hand in his incomplete work to the teacher at the end of class, feeling bad that he was not able to do it correctly.

In the second district, Amid’s ESL class was targeted solely at beginning-level ELLs. Like at the first school, this ESL class was held in a small group room. It was located near the school library and away from the mainstream classes. Amid felt cramped in the small windowless classroom with about 20 other learners. Although the classroom was decorated with maps and photos of places with which he was familiar, the ESL instruction did not fit with Amid’s background. He had had little schooling and was not literate in his native language. His teacher had assumed that Amid understood some of the basics of reading and writing, but he didn’t.

Before his family moved to the third location, Amid asked them to let him drop out of school. “I am not learning anything,” Amid lamented to his parents. “It would be better for me to work. I would be happier.” Thankfully, his parents refused to allow him to quit school.

In his third school, Amid was placed in an ESL classroom that looked like every other mainstream class in the school. His ESL class was housed in the English wing of the high school and was the same in terms of size and appearance as the other English classes. This ESL class was designed for students like Amid. Everyone was a beginning-level ELL and had not attended school regularly before attending this school. During the 2 hours of ESL class time, Amid and a group of peers worked on the same projects and tasks. Within a few months, he had made much more progress than he had in the prior two schools. He also forgot about his earlier desire to drop out of school.

Which of these schools resembles the one in which your ESL class is situated? We all represent very different types of programming and students. To address students’ needs, we should look at our programming and ask ourselves: What is reasonable in terms of the amount of time that an ELL should receive instruction in ESL? Does your district have a policy and practice for this amount of time?

I surveyed 26 school districts about the amount of time that they spend on ESL instruction. I received a myriad of responses as to the amount of time that beginning, intermediate, and transitioning ELLs were instructed in ESL. The responses ranged from some schools that could not find an ESL teacher and did not provide this type of instruction at all to schools that pro-
His teacher had assumed that Amid understood some of the basics of reading and writing, but he didn’t.

In the early 1970s, a group of TESOL members, mostly people from the United States teaching English abroad, proposed that a special interest group be established to represent those teaching EFL outside the United States.

This year marks the 35th anniversary of TESOL’s English as a Foreign Language Interest Section (EFLIS). To celebrate this occasion, I interviewed a few past chairs of EFLIS. Based on the interviews, I will share some history about this IS.

In the early 1970s, a group of TESOL members, mostly people from the United States teaching English abroad, proposed that a special interest group be established to represent those teaching EFL outside the United States. In 1974, TESOL passed a motion that a new interest group be founded. Thus was created the Teaching English Abroad Special Interest Group (TEA-SIG).

Gloria Kreisher, who was teaching English in Poland at the time, was TEA-SIG chair in 1979. The SIG was small in size, and some members were Fulbright scholars teaching English in various countries. In 1984, TEA-SIG changed its name to Teaching English Internationally (TEI). The change was based on the rationale that Teaching English Abroad was a name that assumed that TESOL was a U.S. organization. With the realization that TESOL was an international organization, the word abroad was no longer appropriate.

Five years later, during the tenure of Thomas Robb (1984), TEI changed its name to English as a Foreign Language Interest Section (EFLIS). Several reasons were given to justify the name change. First, TEI was defined geographically rather than academically, whereas EFL is more academically focused. Second, the implied role of TEI was identical to the mission of TESOL. Third, TESOL needed an IS to be more specifically involved in matters of EFL. And finally, IS membership supported the change. Also revised was the TEI statement of purpose, which came closer to its present version for EFLIS.

Some of the EFLIS past chairs from these early days, including Gary Butzbach, Richard Boyum, Marcia Fisk-Ong, and Lisa Harshbarger, are

Happy Birthday, EFLIS!

by Ke Xu

This year marks the 35th anniversary of TESOL’s English as a Foreign Language Interest Section (EFLIS). To celebrate this occasion, I interviewed a few past chairs of EFLIS. Based on the interviews, I will share some history about this IS.

In the early 1970s, a group of TESOL members, mostly people from the United States teaching English abroad, proposed that a special interest group be established to represent those teaching EFL outside the United States. In 1974, TESOL passed a motion that a new interest group be founded. Thus was created the Teaching English Abroad Special Interest Group (TEA-SIG).

Gloria Kreisher, who was teaching English in Poland at the time, was TEA-SIG chair in 1979. The SIG was small in size, and some members were Fulbright scholars teaching English in various countries. In 1984, TEA-SIG changed its name to Teaching English Internationally (TEI). The change was based on the rationale that Teaching English Abroad was a name that assumed that TESOL was a U.S. organization. With the realization that TESOL was an international organization, the word abroad was no longer appropriate.

Five years later, during the tenure of Thomas Robb (1984), TEI changed its name to English as a Foreign Language Interest Section (EFLIS). Several reasons were given to justify the name change. First, TEI was defined geographically rather than academically, whereas EFL is more academically focused. Second, the implied role of TEI was identical to the mission of TESOL. Third, TESOL needed an IS to be more specifically involved in matters of EFL. And finally, IS membership supported the change. Also revised was the TEI statement of purpose, which came closer to its present version for EFLIS.

Some of the EFLIS past chairs from these early days, including Gary Butzbach, Richard Boyum, Marcia Fisk-Ong, and Lisa Harshbarger, are provided 2 ½ hours per day for beginning, 1 ½ hours for intermediate, and 45 minutes for transitioning ELLs. Although some districts have policies and procedures for the amount of time that students spend in their ESL classes, many base this time on the English proficiency levels of students. This calculation can be misleading. Some ELLs enter a U.S. public school because their prior learning experiences are similar. A significant number, however, have not had prior schooling and literacy-based experiences that are similar to what occurs in U.S. public schools. As a result, many students struggle to learn English, learn the curriculum, and still become active learners.

Some districts are focusing their attention and programming on students with interrupted formal education. Many districts are not. More needs to be done to address the growing population of ELLs in the United States and the length of time that students should be given on a daily basis for their ESL classes. In addition, the decision about the amount of time for ESL instruction should be based on more than a student’s English proficiency level. Students’ prior learning and literacy development experiences are critical factors for planning and delivering programming. When all of this is taken into consideration, students like Amid will have a greater and more equitable chance to succeed in school.

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still active in the IS as well as TESOL. Gary Butzbach, who was director of the American Language Center in Rabat, Morocco, during both of his terms as chair (1988, 2000), was on the EFLIS proposal review team last year. Two things he mentioned about his memories of the old days were truly touching:

During my first term, our newsletter editor was working in a small village in Niger that didn’t have electricity. As she put together the newsletter, she would often go to Niame to send me the copy she’d been working on while I was in Rabat or southern France during my vacation. I’d type this into my computer, an Apple IID, literally cutting and pasting images she wanted included, and send something like a camera-ready copy to TESOL Central Office (CO), where they printed and distributed the final newsletter.

Another memory I have is of reading abstracts for the convention. CO would send me hard copies of all the EFLIS-related abstracts, often a couple hundred of them. I’d divide these amongst my readers and snail-mail these copies to them around the world. Then, during vacation I’d do my own reading and I would select and rank the abstracts, receive the judgments of my readers, put these all together, and return the final selection to CO. This was quite a time-consuming process and I was usually late sending the selection to TESOL, but the organizers were patient and understanding.

Marcia Fisk-Ong, currently serving on TESOL’s Board of Directors, remembers drafting the first set of EFLIS governing rules while she was chair in 1992:

I was in London when I was chair, writing a series of classroom texts for Longman. At that time, as an American, there was little possibility for me to teach English in England because of my accent. It really made me sensitive to the discrimination NNESTs [nonnative-English-speaking teachers] suffer even today. . . . TESOL leadership positions back then, including those in EFLIS, were held mostly by native speakers.

I felt strongly that since most EFL teachers were nonnative speakers, the leadership of our IS should reflect this fact and therefore we should actively engage NNESTs in leadership roles. This was precisely my mission as EFLIS chair, which we accomplished. I am proud to have had a role in getting NNESTs to run for and be elected to the chair of the IS. I believe that our IS’s role in tearing down that barrier was instrumental in nudging TESOL in the same direction.

Lisa Harshbarger became EFLIS chair in 1996 when she was an English language fellow at the Board of Education in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and has been active in TESOL ever since. In 2008 she became chair of TESOL’s Interest Section Leadership Council. JoeAnn Miller, Chair of TESOL’s Technology Advisory Committee, was EFLIS chair in 2001 when she was an English program coordinator at the Universidad del Valle de Mexico. EFLIS was then the largest IS in TESOL, she recalled.

During my term as chair in 2008, I was fortunate to be guided by Jane Hoelker, who has extensive international teaching experience and coached me all the way, and Sally Harris, from whom I learned all the tricks in managing an IS. They both were EFLIS chairs more than once.

Jane Hoelker, also a TESOL Board member now, was chair in 2004 and 2006. The EFLIS governing rules were revised during her terms. Sally Harris, a professor of English and Fulbright scholar in Tanzania, was chair in 2002, 2003, and 2007. Her most important contribution was helping the EFLIS move from paper-based communication to electronic communication, including e-voting for IS leaders and electronic abstract submission and review.

I also received strong support from Toni Hull, EFLIS’s current chair. Toni was teaching English in Russia when she became chair-elect of EFLIS and is currently an English language fellow teaching college English in Vietnam. EFLIS’s 35 years of growth and achievement reflects thousands of TESOL members’ selfless devotion to TESOL. Without their sacrifice, this association would not have become the world’s largest organization for English language teaching professionals. Good luck, TESOL. And happy birthday, EFLIS!
When the goal of ESOL is to provide a holistic approach to the English language and the cultures of its speakers, culture maps are a powerful tool to help teachers track cultural aspects that are presented to students (see my column in the June issue of *Essential Teacher*). To provide a holistic approach, however, not only are more and varied language techniques needed, but additional resources that will enable students to develop the intercultural competencies appropriate for speaking English. It is essential, therefore, to identify and use language-culture resources.

In the ESL context, many resources are readily available in the environment just outside the classroom. In the EFL context, on the other hand, searching for resources that can be brought into the classroom or used outside the classroom requires a bit more effort. In either case, native- as well as nonnative-English-speaking teachers can benefit by investigating language-culture resources and finding better ways to put them to good use. This column focuses on the rationale for and use of culturally relevant resources.

Recalling the acquisition-learning distinction in terms of language can help us here. Teachers are familiar with learning because it refers to what occurs in the typical classroom. Language learning, as generally understood, results from controlled and structured lesson plans that are carefully designed and implemented by teachers. As a result, learning is directed and guided by the lesson plan as well as directly related to (and limited by) the specific input chosen by teachers.

In contrast, language acquisition occurs when students are in direct contact with authentic language-culture situations, as when traveling internationally. Today, increasing numbers of students are taking advantage of such opportunities through exchange programs and independent travel. In the process, they are exposed to multiple aspects of both language and culture from sounds, forms, grammar, and meaning to nonverbal, interactive, and cultural dimensions of communication. But they are also exposed to a great variety of speakers. The result is more holistic language-culture development.

Naturally, it would be impossible for language teachers to provide in a classroom the input and exposure offered by direct experience in another culture. A classroom can never replicate being in-country. Hence, it is important that teachers acknowledge their constraints by being the primary and often sole source of input and the basis on which learners re-create a language-culture model for themselves. A single teacher, with an individual “idiolect,” can never adequately represent a whole community of speakers, no matter how well he or she speaks.

Accepting that classrooms are intrinsically limited and a rather artificial setting for language acquisition to occur (not to mention intercultural abilities to develop), the search for resources that enrich the classroom context becomes even more compelling. Audio and visual devices take on new significance, not just as aids but as powerful tools that provide increased samples of speech and cultural diversity. But teachers need not stop with audiovisual aids alone; they might reassess the entire course in terms of the language-culture exposure these aids provide.

Once varied input is understood and accepted as essential, teachers will actively seek additional resources as routine, a search that leads beyond the classroom. In fact, once they witness how authentic and diverse input enriches students’ experiences, there may be no end to this quest and the language classroom may indeed become the “next best thing to being there”—with the advantage of having a professional to guide and facilitate the intercultural process. And once begun, the search for resources normally produces many surprises; resources begin to appear everywhere, and the question then becomes how best to utilize them.

To facilitate the search, language-culture resources may be grouped into five areas: (1) other English speakers, (2) individuals with experience in English-speaking countries, (3) realia, (4) technology, and (5) community resources. The value of utilizing the first category of resources, other English speakers, is obvious. Aside from providing samples of other speech patterns such as those associated with gender and age variations, other English speakers may also

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represent regional or dialect variations. Yet how often do we take advantage of this resource, even in EFL contexts? In addition, nonnative speakers with experience in English-speaking countries have much to offer. Often, individuals who have learned English as a second language and use it successfully serve as excellent role models for students, demonstrating that they can do it, too.

Realia and technology are also resources that can be easily transported and used in the classroom. Of course, most teachers already use realia, so the point here is mostly to remind them of its utility in teaching language and culture. For example, units that involve the use of currency, music, slides, pictures, games, newspapers, food, maps, and the like are all interesting and motivating.

And today, technology fulfills an important role in assisting the development of language-culture abilities. Aside from audiovisual resources such as videos, CDs, and television, computers also allow access to practically anything we want via the Internet. Students can communicate directly with other learners and other speakers anywhere in the world through blogs and e-mail, and Skype connections (especially when accompanied by a webcam) make it possible to talk in real time, face to face, with anyone anywhere in the world, and at no cost! Of course, care must be taken to account for time differences when contacting people in other time zones.

Given these possibilities, one realizes the wealth of teaching resources that exist. Although obvious in the ESL context, these tools and techniques are not always so obvious in EFL situations. Yet even in the latter case, exploration normally uncovers more possibilities than one ever imagined: foreign newspapers and periodicals, international businesses, educational institutions, ethnic groups, and ex-pat individuals, clubs, and organizations, and so on.

In the end, it is often less a matter of availability and more one of having a clear understanding of why and how to use resources effectively. Teachers who understand the value of identifying and using language-culture resources to augment and enrich the classroom experience increase students’ language proficiency and intercultural competencies, with no limit to the possibilities. For this to happen, however, we need to think creatively and go beyond the language classroom.

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FROM A TO Z

The Mystery of the Perfect Method

by Dorothy Zemach

When I was a child, I enjoyed a certain series of detective novels whose main characters were a group of teens who existed in some fictional world between high school and the work world, who lived at home but had their own cars, money, and total freedom. In each story in the series, the teens would find the buried treasure, locate the missing heiress, or discover the true identity of the mysterious stranger.

At some point in the beginning of almost every story, a warning would be delivered to the young detectives. It might come wrapped around a rock thrown through the living room window, or be tied to the shaft of a South American arrow shot from behind a tree, or slipped into one’s coat pocket in a crowded train station. “Stay away from Lone Pines Farm—or else!” “You’re in grave danger. Leave immediately!” “The spirit of the mummy’s tomb will curse you!” While lesser sidekicks of the main detectives would be worried and ask to quit the case, our heroes would frown over the message (as if this didn’t happen every week) and then declare: “Why . . . I think someone’s just trying to scare us away!”

Over the years, I’ve had warnings from proponents of new methods and current teaching trends. They don’t come crashing through my window tied to rocks, fortunately, but are announced in graduate school classes and conference presentations, in journal articles and methodology books, or perhaps by colleagues and supervisors. “Don’t use drills! They’re boring!” “Every task must be authentic!” “Writing comments on students’ papers is a waste of time—they never read them!” “That activity isn’t communicative!”
Which warnings are shot at you depends on your age and your teaching context. It seems to me that most of my warnings have involved communicative language teaching, the approach most likely to be stamped GRAS ("generally recognized as safe") by institutions where I have taught.

As a textbook writer and materials designer, I spend a great deal of time now writing exercises I'm told must seem "authentic" and "communicative." That is, every situation should be as close as possible to something in "real life." Dialogues should sound natural. Speaking activities should be designed to get students to say things they would say outside of the classroom. Reading topics should be of current and high interest to students—preferably every student. Students should write on topics that are personally meaningful.

None of these are bad goals, of course. I want to state very clearly here that I am not against communicative activities or authentic communication. However, I think there's something to be said for the artificial as well, at least in the context of a language classroom. The classroom is not "real life." Even if we put on costumes and roleplay our hearts out while doing our communicative activities, it's still a classroom. Why, though, should this be a disadvantage? Why do we not see it as a tremendous advantage? In real life, students can't listen to a conversation over and over again to see where a misunderstanding occurred. They can't (or at least, they probably shouldn't) repeat a word 30 times until they're satisfied with their pronunciation. Precisely because it is not real life, the classroom is a unique place to study language.

I use many communicative activities when I teach, and I don't write any exercise for a textbook or workbook that I would not use myself and do not believe is useful. However, in the classes that I teach, students also do drills. Sometimes I dress these drills up as games, but sometimes I don't. Students memorize dialogues. They even memorize vocabulary lists. I've been known to give dictations and to have students copy out corrected sentences. Why, students even engage in choral repetitions.

I do these things in class because they work. They work for me, and they've worked for my students. That is, they help students learn English, and learn it efficiently. To me, that is the overarching definition of authentic, after all. If a student's purpose is to learn English, then anything that helps him or her learn English is an authentic English-learning activity. These activities prepare students for real-life interactions; they don't need to (and sometimes, in fact, they should not) imitate real life. Just as soccer players stretch and practice kicking and blocking, just as musicians learn scales and chords that will later be integrated into larger pieces, students in my classes learn discrete chunks of language that will later be used to communicate freely.

Now, I can't say this approach would work for everyone. You can't solve the Mystery of the Perfect Method, because in the case of teaching and learning, there is no one answer. There is no perfect method for everyone, or even for one teacher for every class. Instead of looking for one answer, look at your career as a series of mysteries. Let different teaching philosophies and approaches be your clues and warnings. Discard techniques that don't work, and try out new techniques that you discover. If you can't find materials to support what you want to do, create your own. Then take your materials and techniques and apply them to The Secret of the Silent Oral Skills Class, The Clue of the Graduate Teaching Assistant, The Mystery of the Surly Reading Class, or The Puzzle of the Plagiarized Paper and solve each mystery as it comes to you, week after week, as the star of your own teaching series.

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See also "Project-Based Instruction: Writing Grant Proposals," www.tesol.org/et/.

If a student’s purpose is to learn English, then anything that helps him or her learn English is an authentic English-learning activity.
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In the 18 years I have lived in Jamaica, a Caribbean island with a total population of two and a half million people, I have taught EFL, ESL, German, and communication skills at United Theological College, the Vocational Training Development Institute, and two other educational institutions. I have traveled across the island giving communications workshops, visiting schools to evaluate teacher trainees, and listening to student sermons. I have belonged to the same church and taught Sunday school at our church’s mission for the whole time that I have lived here. I have also quilted with the same group of Jamaican friends for these 18 years.

Yet I am still a tourist, guest, and foreigner in this land.

Official and Unofficial Language

Jamaica’s official language is English. All instruction in schools and most business, at least in the capital of Kingston, is purportedly conducted in English, as are newscasts and most church services. Tourism, a vital industry in this country, requires English of its workers. English is the language of the government and all of its documents. However, in informal situations, virtually every native-born Jamaican understands and speaks Jamaican Creole, otherwise known as Patois. Theater performances (particularly comedy), dramatic poetry readings, some newspaper columns, and some types of literature all use Creole.

Although I understand Creole well enough to get by, I still cannot—dare not—speak it, for as an outsider I have not earned the right to it, nor can I ever. Historically, those who speak Creole have earned that badge of honor through the suffering of their ancestors under the burden of slavery and indentured servitude. My heritage and skin color inhibit my participation in the Creole-speaking, and thus authentic, Jamaican world.

Of course, there are moments when people ask me good-naturedly to say a few things in Creole, and I can oblige. At times, whole conversations in Creole go on unapologetically in my presence (which is an enormous compliment) and code-switching, which I will never fully master like a native Creole speaker, is sometimes possible, even for me. Nevertheless, no one would ever call me Creole/English bilingual.

Jamaican Creole is a language learned only via human contact. I am embarrassed and
troubled by my halting Creole because it seems to imply that I have somehow failed in my relationships with Jamaicans. This makes me recall how Smith and Carvill (2000), in *The Gift of the Stranger*, describe Dr. Albert Schweitzer in the movie *Le Grand Blanc de Lambaréné* as a “stranger who did not love enough” (p. 65). According to an African woman in the film, he “can only give, but not share” because “in all the years you’ve been with us you’ve made no effort to acquire our language” (p. 66).

**Trying to Access a Largely Inaccessible Language**

Not long after moving to Jamaica, I attended a single class at the Language Training Centre, where I was teaching at the time, that helped me understand Jamaican Creole, but there is no other formal effort in Jamaica to teach the country’s Creole as a foreign language. Most Jamaicans are truly bilingual and can select at any moment which language they want to use. Because I am an English lecturer by profession, most people, even my good friends, choose English for conversations with me.

With the help of grammar books, most of them written by expatriates trying to rationalize the language they could learn no other way, I have been able to acquire enough grammar skills to teach many Creole structures side by side with English, which has been quite useful for the students I have taught. Like the other expatriates, I was even able to write a grammar handbook with comparative structures, which we have used at the Vocational Training Development Institute for 6 years. However, this is not the same as speaking the language.

In Sunday school, the children speak Creole to me and I understand, though with difficulty. They respond to my English, which they expect me to speak, in Creole. Their Jamaican teachers and priests teach in standard English, too, and encourage students to speak English because Sunday school is an opportunity to improve children’s language skills as well as to provide religious education. Once, when I had laryngitis, I asked a teenager to speak for me. I whispered to her and she unconsciously translated everything I said into Creole. I was the only one who noticed that the translating was going on!

Reading Jamaican literature and newspaper columns in Creole has helped my intellectual understanding of the language. My Jamaican colleagues and friends have always

*After 18 years in this country, folks who do not know me well are still explaining the culture, the language, and the people as if I had just arrived.*
obliged with good humor when asked for translations and interpretations, and they have frequently supplied me with proverbs that have helped me understand the culture reflected in the language.

Still on the Outside Looking In

The problem is, I am still getting that help! After 18 years in this country, folks who do not know me well are still explaining the culture, the language, and the people as if I had just arrived. If I do a workshop on the seaside North Coast, attendees who do not know me from previous classes take my “foreigner” advice lightly, assuming that it is likely to be culturally skewed. To and from class, I am expected to pay the exorbitant taxi fares charged to tourists, even though my native-born colleagues pay the “Jamaican fee.”

My attempts to throw a little Creole into the conversation are invariably met with laughter. Why? Is it a way to tell me, “Don’t go there—this is our world”? Or is it just the unavoidable price I pay for looking different from the largest portion of the population and having a stubborn American accent?

Most of us living outside our native countries by choice are eager to assimilate into the culture that surrounds us. We see the faces of our friends and colleagues far more often than we see our own, and gradually we begin to forget that there is any difference between us and those whose historical and present experience of the country is much deeper than ours. However, being visually different from everyone else, and to a certain extent shut out of the language, makes assimilation difficult.

In the long view, this is not necessarily bad. I am, after all, a U.S. citizen by birth and have done nothing to change that. One of my U.S. colleagues, after many years in Jamaica, did assume Jamaican citizenship, but that did not alter his special position in the country. When he speaks even now, as when I do, a particular historical memory comes into play that must be taken into account.

For me, this is a constant reminder that I am in Jamaica as an invited guest, even after so many years. Yes, I am walking together with my colleagues and friends, but as a guest who will always have a different status from everyone else here, it might be easier for me to forget this vital fact, but it would still be clear to all the people I know, even long-time friends. In this sense, I will always be an outsider in Jamaica.

Perhaps, however, being an outsider can contribute to intercultural understanding. As Bakhtin (1986) writes, “in the realm of culture, outsidership is most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly” (p. 7). As a perpetual outsider, but a welcomed and (I hope) accepted one, I can still participate in the Jamaican social world as one who has a deeper understanding of both myself within my own and my adopted cultures and Jamaicans within theirs.

References


Mary Hills Kuck is an English language and communications lecturer at the Vocational Training Development Institute, HEART Trust, and an English teacher at United Theological College, both in Kingston, Jamaica.
Resurrecting Student Interest in the English Language Classroom

By San Shwe Baw

Students in some parts of the world may find stories about souls or spirits existing in humans or objects contrary to their own cultural or religious beliefs, and using these stories for teaching purposes may not always be a good idea. However, animism is so intrinsic to Thai cultural beliefs that mysterious stories like the one described in this article whet students’ appetite for more.

Recently, I read on the Internet an interesting case of real-life resurrection in which a Nigerian man returned to life after being dead for more than a day. This case of a seemingly unnatural phenomenon reminded me of similar events that happened in my country, Burma, when I was young, and it unexpectedly provided me with useful insight into the humanistic aspect of language teaching.

A Past Experience

In my first year as a teacher in Burma, I used two real-life stories in a class to avoid the well-worn textbook and the monotony of the usual classroom activities. The first was about an old man from an island near my town who came back to life while a Buddhist monk was giving a sermon at the man’s funeral ceremony.

The second was about a 5-year-old girl found alive by gravediggers on the day she was buried. The gravediggers had noticed that the dead girl was still wearing her earrings when she was buried, so they returned to her grave at night and opened the coffin to steal the earrings. To their surprise, they found the girl alive, and one of them adopted her as his child. Seven years later, a court case ensued between the adopted father and her biological parents regarding custody of the girl.

Though I thought the activity was over when I finished telling the two stories, the students kept probing me about many details. However, at the time, I did not have the slightest idea of how I could turn their motivation into more productive communication. So when I came across the real-life story of the Nigerian man recently, I decided to use it in my class and see if I could take the activity further.

The Story

The following is a summary of the Nigerian man’s story. The original story that I had students read at home prior to engaging in oral activities in class can be found at www.megashift.org/html/DanielEkechukwu.html.

On November 30, 2001, Daniel Ekechukwu was driving home with his friend Kingsley Iruka after giving his father a goat for Christmas. His speeding car crashed into a stone pillar, seriously wounding Daniel though only slightly injuring Iruka. When Daniel’s wife Nneka arrived at the hospital, he was barely alive and asked her to take him to his family doctor’s hospital in Owerri. Shortly after being placed in the ambulance, Daniel became unconscious.

At the Owerri Regional Hospital, a member of the medical staff checked on Daniel and declared that he was already dead. Unconvinced, Nneka took Daniel to St. Eunice Clinic, where his death was reconfirmed. From there, the body was taken to the Ikeduru General Hospital Mortuary, laid out between two other corpses, and administered the usual chemical preservative injection.

Still refusing to come to terms with reality, on December 2 Nneka decided to take Daniel in his coffin and set off on the long drive to a church in Onitsha where Reinhard Bonnke was to speak at a dedication ceremony. There, the church bishop’s son and another pastor laid the body, overcome by rigor
mortis, on a table. The pastors soon noticed that the corpse’s stomach was twitching slightly; then the corpse started breathing in short bursts. They got a video camera, began praying, and started massaging the body from head to foot.

Almost 2 days after being declared dead, Daniel awoke and people started gathering around to see him. By that evening, he was fully coherent.

How I Used the Story

I asked students to read the story at home, instructing them to remember the involvement of each person in the story. And then in class we engaged in the following activities.

Activity 1: General comprehension check (5 minutes). To check whether they had read the story at home and to ascertain their understanding, I asked the whole class these simple short-answer questions:

1. Why did Daniel take the trip? (to give a goat to his father as a Christmas present)
2. Who was in the car with Daniel when the accident happened? (Kingsley Iruka)
3. Why was Daniel moved from the first hospital? (because he asked his wife to take him to his family doctor’s hospital in Owerri)
4. What was Daniel’s condition in the ambulance? (he drifted into unconsciousness)
5. Who declared Daniel dead? (a member of the medical staff at Owerri Regional Hospital)
6. Where was the body taken next? (St. Eunice Clinic)
7. How was Daniel’s body placed in the mortuary? (between two corpses)
8. How long was his body kept in the mortuary? (almost 2 days)
9. What was Bonnke doing in Onitsha? (speaking at a dedication ceremony)
10. What happened at the church? (Daniel came back to life)

Activity 2: Short responses through vocabulary revision (about 10 minutes). The aim of this activity was twofold: to help students remember some useful words from the story and to extract short responses from them. I gave students the following definitions of selected words, but without providing the defined words, and asked them to find the corresponding words from the story:

1. A word meaning people throw up something through the mouth (vomit)
2. Saving from danger (rescue)
3. A unit in the hospital where seriously ill people are given treatment (intensive care unit or ICU)
4. A condition similar to sleep in which you do not see, feel, or think, usually because you are injured (unconsciousness)
5. At the St. Eunice Clinic, a doctor supported the previous statement that Daniel was already dead. What is the exact word that the doctor used? (confirm)
6. A building where a dead body is kept until the time of the funeral (mortuary)
7. A long box in which a dead person is buried (coffin)
8. The dead body of a person (corpse)
9. A medical term for the stiffening of the muscles after death (rigor mortis)
10. Coming back to life (resurrection)

Activity 3: Preparing to initiate conversation based on story recall (about 10 minutes). In this activity, I asked students two questions that would require them to think critically about the amazing event that had happened to Daniel:

1. What are some of the facts in the passage that indicate that Daniel’s death was real?
2. Do you think Daniel truly died?

In response to the first question, one student brought up the fact that for nearly 2 days Daniel did not breathe because his heart had stopped beating. Another replied that Daniel had been injected with a harsh chemical to impede mortification. Yet another reasoned that as a corpse, Daniel was carted around, pulled about, and lay in an airless narrow coffin for hours.
My intention with the second question was to encourage students to express their opinions about whether they doubted the nature of Daniel’s death. As expected, some pointed out the fact that he had been seen by two doctors who had certified his death. Others, however, argued that the examinations were brief and the doctors could have overlooked minimal signs of life. This conflict of opinions was a good development because it would most likely prod students into more active participation in the coming activities.

**Activity 4: Free talk (about 30 minutes).** In this activity, one student pretended to be a journalist from an internationally recognized magazine and interview all the important people involved in this story (played by other students) regarding the nature of Daniel’s resurrection for a feature story in the magazine’s Drama in Real Life section. Because quite a few people were involved at different times in Daniel’s story, this activity allowed many students to participate. The students who had been most active in the previous activities were chosen for this role-play activity. The journalist who did the interview was played by the most fluent student in class.

**Activity 5: Debate (about 25 minutes).** This activity was designed especially for students who still wanted to express their opinions regarding Daniel’s resurrection. To start, I divided the participants into two groups, believers and nonbelievers, and let them take turns talking: one believer versus one nonbeliever. However, at the end of the debate no winner was announced because, culturally speaking, winning and losing can be a very sensitive issue.

Usually, oral activities are characterized by just a few fluent students taking the dominant roles while less proficient students merely look on. In the activities discussed here, however, everyone was involved, confirming the fact that students can be made to talk if the subject matter is relevant to their interests. The practice of using human interest stories in oral classes can provide learners with not only opportunities to talk but also a platform for discussing thought-provoking matters analytically.

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What do a language learner and an improvisational actor have in common?

Quite a bit, actually, from my perspective of being both.

Since I was a teenager, I have been fascinated with other languages, and back then I started methodically learning as many as I could. For years I have walked around with book in hand, scrawled sheets of vocabulary in my pocket, a portable cassette player, and, more recently, an iPod—trying to cram as much language into my brain as I could.

But early on I had a major setback. No matter how much I studied or how thoroughly I mastered verb declensions, adjective forms, cases and tenses, when it came time to have an actual face-to-face encounter with a native speaker of that language, every piece of knowledge in my head flew from my brain like a flock of startled starlings scattering to the winds.

My mind went blank. I was scared. And I felt like a complete idiot. It was a tremendously demoralizing experience. At least, that was the case until 1991, when I became a professional improv actor.

What Can We Learn From Improv?

Improv theater is unlike other forms of theater in that nothing is scripted or rehearsed. A couple of actors get on stage, get a suggestion from the audience, and just start. To be able to do this, a special set of skills is required. These skills enable an actor to get on stage without a thought in his or her head and create an entertaining scene—complete with characters, story, and environment—for a paying and appreciative audience.

I later took the same skills that allowed me to “just start” on stage and used them to “just start” speaking a foreign language with a native speaker. It worked remarkably well.

As an improv actor, I performed five shows every weekend, but I also had a day job working as a sign language interpreter at a local community college (a result of my longstanding fascination with languages). Because deaf college students are often put into ESL classes to whip their English into academic shape, I spent at least half of my 50-hour work week sitting in ESL classes watching dozens of teachers confront the issues that ESL students deal with—especially the lack of confidence and risk taking on the part of students. Of course, being a language learner, I could relate.

Somewhere along the line (about 12 years along, as it turned out), an idea occurred to me: improv, ESL, ESL, improv. Hmm. I had long ago lost my fear and apprehension in terms of trying out a language with a native speaker, even when my skill in that language was rudimentary. And it was my training as an improv actor that had weaned me from that paralyzing fear.

When you think about it, the situation of a language learner is remarkably analogous to that of an improv actor. Both are expected to perform without a script, both are nervous, and for both, the stakes are high. The difference is that the improv actor has been trained to react constructively to the situation, whereas the language learner has been trained primarily in grammar and vocabulary.

When I shared my idea with one of the college teachers whose class I was interpreting, she agreed to let me try teaching some improv to one of her classes. That was 6 years ago, and I have been teaching improv to language learners and teachers ever since. The skills require no special talent. They are simple, powerful, and eminently teachable—anyone can learn them.

Language Learners Love It

The transformation in the classroom is quick and dramatic. I have seen rooms full of bored and lackluster students suddenly start ringing with laughter and delight. I have seen hostile and fearful faces start smiling and leading the charge. And it is almost a cliché that the shyest person in the room becomes a chest-thumping hero.

What’s more, I have heard English spoken. I have seen students open their mouths and hear English pour out of them—lovely, confident, creative English.

I would summarize the benefits I have seen from improv training as follows:

- **Motivation (inspire):** Improv games and exercises inject a tremendous feeling of fun into the classroom. Students who slumped back in the corners before become enthusiastic and involved.
- **Fluency (teach):** The use of language in so many different emotional and
narrative contexts helps students acquire language in a deep and brain-friendly way.

- **Social competency (empower):** The most dramatic effect in my view is that the skills and principles of improv theater enable students to go into a communicative situation with native speakers and perform optimally. It is tremendously exciting to see how powerful a little improv training can be in this regard. Students who would never approach native speakers now have the tools to walk up and “just start.”

These are the improv principles I stress when training language learners:

- **Commitment:** Actors must be willing to throw themselves completely into a role. There are no half measures. For example, if I am called on to enter the scene as a wolf, I will drop to my hands and knees and howl as if my life depended on it.
- **Listening:** If an actor on stage is not paying attention, he or she could miss an important plot twist that could make the next line of dialogue seem like utter and complete nonsense. Language learners, like improv actors, can also get into big trouble by thinking too much about what they are going to say next instead of just opening up their ears and trusting themselves.
- **Acceptance:** Improv actors treat everything that is said or done on stage as an offer that can be either accepted or rejected, and scenes with accepted offers move forward more successfully than scenes in which offers are consistently rejected.
- **Support:** Improv theater is the ultimate team sport. If you are not constantly supporting the choices of the actors on stage and shoring up their efforts, the scene often fails.
- **Spontaneity:** Whether you are learning a new language or doing improv theater, if you second-guess everything you are about to say, then you could end up babbling nonsense. Improv actors are trained to trust their instincts and their ability to recover quickly from bad decisions—something language learners can certainly also benefit from.
- **Fun:** If you aren’t having fun doing improv, then your audience won’t either. Improv trains language learners to lean into their encounters with native speakers with a positive expectation of success.

I teach improv skills in the wider context of a communication strategy. I explicitly teach this to students to use in their communication challenges with native speakers. By having a desired goal in mind, making a bold strategic choice, improvising competently, and learning from the results, students improve their language skills and social abilities by orders of magnitude.

It is helpful to keep in mind a few principles before teaching improv to language learners:

- **Offer unconditional positive regard:** Love your students. Make them feel that they are liked and appreciated, and that you are on their side.
- **Be the first into the breach:** Your students will only be as energetic as you are. You must model the sort of commitment you want. That means often being the zaniest person in the class.
- **Failure is okay:** More than okay! Mistakes are opportunities to exercise creative problem-solving skills and to learn. Laugh at the gaffes.
- **Take small steps:** Build those principles slowly. Gradually raise the stakes. Students can learn to become big risk takers by proceeding to take incrementally bigger risks.
- **Explain and demonstrate clearly:** Take your time explaining the games. Put them together one element at a time; it’s harder to fix things when you’re in the middle of an activity. Always be the first to play a particular game; students will understand it much more clearly by seeing you do it than they will by hearing you describe it.

### A Few Simple Improv Games

There are hundreds of improv games out there. Most (but not all) start with a suggestion from the audience on which the actors can base their scene. The suggestion helps give the actors a place to start. It can be anything. Ask the class for a location, an occupation, or a noun that begins with the letter P. The actors can use the suggestion in any way they want. If the suggestion is “pizza,” they might be
people working in a pizzeria, or they might be someone delivering a pizza to a house.

These games should last anywhere from 1 to 4 minutes. You can end the scene by simply calling out “Scene!” or “Time!”

Paper Slips. Write down on separate slips of paper some vocabulary words that the students have been studying recently, and scatter these about the stage. Then ask two or three students to come up. Get a suggestion and have them start a scene. Occasionally, a student must pick up one of the slips of paper and use the word in his or her next line of dialogue. Then all the actors must justify the sentence in the context of the scene.

Emotional Switch. Have the class create a list of emotions and/or characteristics (e.g., nosy, sad, delighted). Afterward, have two or three students come up, and give them a suggestion to start a scene. Have one person occasionally (about every 30 seconds) call out one of the emotions or characteristics. At that point, all of the characters on stage must take on the emotion as strongly as possible while justifying it in the context of the scene.

Slide Show. Have two students (the “experts”) sit in chairs on one side of the stage. Have two other students (the “slides”) stand on the other side of the stage. Get a suggestion for a topic. The slides create a picture by freezing in some interesting pose. The experts must then describe what is going on in the picture and what it has to do with the topic. When the experts say “Next slide!” the slides change their pose.

No Exit. Have two or three students come up, and give them a location (e.g., restaurant, elevator). After giving them about 30 seconds to establish their characters and the environment, call out “Go!” The students must then try to leave the scene as quickly as possible. To do this, they must justify their exit by giving some sort of reason for their departure (e.g., “I have to go to the bathroom”). The other students, however, can successfully block the exit with a line of dialogue (e.g., “My brother’s in the bathroom right now,” “The bathroom is broken”). The first one out of the scene wins.

We often teach language as if it were an academic subject, but it is really a skill—more like riding a bike than solving an equation. The principles of improv can help students make the leap from the classroom into their dreams. I encourage you to try these ideas with students and see how powerful their effect is. By giving students the tools to be creative and confident in conversations, we are stoking the engine of their success.

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What Students Have to Say

“I made me a lot more confident in standing in front of people.”

“We were sort of afraid at the beginning and in the end everybody was smiling.”

“I think we talked more and felt more confident about conversation after we did all those fun exercises.”

“It was funny and I got good experience how people can start conversation. It helped me a lot, because it was a natural lesson and natural practice.”

“I think that the thing that most helped me was to know that if we are nice with the person we are going to talk with, we can continue the conversation and make it fun. Well, like many people know nobody is perfect and all of us have mistakes even when we talk, but he helped to me to feel more confident and acceptance with myself.”

“I really like when everybody was doing a funny thing for the rest of the class, and most of them were really funny. And I like because we were free in this moment doing funny things sometimes we think are stupid but they are not really.”

“It made one important thing, to think more quickly when I’m going to speak, and do not feel bad if I make some mistakes when I’m speaking, and give a 100% in all things that I’m going to do.”

I have seen rooms full of bored and lackluster students suddenly start ringing with laughter and delight.
I received a notice that my class would soon have a new English language learner (ELL) from China, a student who spoke minimal English. Apprehension and dismay were my initial reactions because I knew that students with limited functional pragmatics in English were the most difficult for me to teach and acclimate into our classroom and society. My suspicions were confirmed when I met this particular student after he was assigned to the level-A ESL class I teach in a sheltered program at a high school in Toronto, Canada. Due to funding concerns, many of these newly arrived ELLs are placed with more high-level ELLs, which affects the transition process for beginning-level students.

On a daily basis, I am confronted with new students who have limited English proficiency, many of whom come from vastly different cultural situations and must adjust their way of life to Canadian society. The daunting task that I face is to help guide and counsel them throughout this potentially quite difficult adjustment process.

It became clear almost immediately that my new student, Tim (not his real name), was withdrawn and distant towards me and other members of the class. Although he was engaging in classroom activities, he showed high levels of anxiety and fear in response to my lessons. After scouring my ESOL pedagogical textbooks, I deduced that he must be in culture shock, which resulted in great social distance between him and the other students.

Some newly arrived ELLs often have great problems in this acculturation process. Brown (1994) describes four stages that these students go through in overcoming culture shock: the euphoric stage, in which newcomers view their environment as exotic or new; the survival stage, which is frustrating and stressful to them; the recovery stage, in which they begin to recover while stress and anxiety start to decrease; and the full recovery stage, which allows ELLs to fit into their new role in society.

Many of these newcomers have not been in an academic school setting for some time, and others are not familiar with the Roman alphabet or Canadian culture. Hence, they have many natural anxieties, fears, and motivation problems in the ESL classroom, which take a great deal of time and effort for me, and other ESL teachers in similar situations, to address.

Carnival Laughter

In response to these problems, I turned to my English literary background for an out-of-the-box solution. One day I came across an article about Russian Formalist Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1982) use of carnival laughter in literature. I was searching for a text in my office when I came across this theory, and I thought that maybe I could implement some of his ideas in my lesson plans. Although still skeptical, I desperately reached out to carnival laughter to get through to Tim in my classroom.

What is carnival laughter? Bakhtin (1982) suggests that the use of a carnival atmosphere in stories reduces the reader’s stress and fear because doing so incorporates laughter. He also suggests that this type of stress-free environment could create an educational process that allows learning to take place. The million-dollar question in my mind was clear: Could Bakhtin’s theory help Tim overcome culture shock? Intrigued by the possibilities, I made an assumption that some of Bakhtin’s dialogical, carnival process could reduce Tim’s fear and anxiety. Something that occurred in class proved my hypothesis correct.

Another ELL in class was inactive and disinterested one day during a grammar lesson and actually fell asleep. One of his friends woke him in a humorous manner that made the whole class erupt in laughter. I noticed that Tim, usually withdrawn and distant, started to laugh as well. He began to engage socially with other students and become part of the learning environment. That’s when it hit me that my hypothesis could work: If I could engage this newcomer with carnival laughter, I could indeed reduce his stress, social distance, and fear of learning the target language!
So now I knew that carnival laughter might help Tim overcome any negative emotions he was experiencing and encourage his integration into the class. Bakhtin (1982) proposes that laughter is the only universal emotion that can break down barriers and allow students to lower their affective filter: “Genetically . . . laughter is the all-human, universal and utopian element emotion” (pp. 11–12). Furthermore, he states that making a carnival type of environment results in “laughter for all the people. . . . It is directed at all and everyone” (pp. 11–12). The carnival environment provides a dialogic learning atmosphere in which everyone in class has a voice.

I went home feeling good and thinking positively, and I started to research other effective practices for lowering students’ fear and anxiety. I found an ESOL text highlighting the idea that, to lower anxiety, the standard accepted notions of the affective domain suggest using music and media texts in addition to laughter in order to reduce stress (Oxford, 1999). This strategy sounded like it fit quite well with the carnival spirit described by Bakhtin (1982), so I decided to incorporate it into my lesson planning.

**Enlisting Help From The Simpsons**

One day, I decided to show an episode of *The Simpsons* in class. I was surprised that Tim was familiar with this program, but it turns out that he had seen the show in Hong Kong. Something instantly happened when the opening credits appeared on the screen: His face lit up, and he became engaged and destressed all at once. It seemed that the tension he felt as a result of being in a totally different society and learning environment melted away entirely. In that moment, he saw the familiar, lovable yellow faces that embraced the carnival spirit.

Tim hung on every line, joke, allusion, and situation in the episode. I was unsure that he comprehended much of the discourse used, but he seemed to understand most of the satire and humor. In fact, he laughed and laughed as the show engaged him like never before. Afterward, I discussed the critical merits of the show and instructed students to respond to the episode in writing.

With the aid of his computerized translator, Tim produced a paragraph that was startling and quite moving. He stated that watching this show made him feel a sense of belonging for the first time in his adopted land. He felt at ease and, also for the first time in his new classroom, ready to learn. I asked him what specifically made him regain this sense of ease, and he replied simply that the show’s characters were “funny.” Indeed, in summarizing the characters from *The Simpsons*, Dark (2002) supports this idea: “Something about them commands affection. All are soft and big-eyed” (p. 43). This show, with its carnival-like effect, had reduced Tim’s distance and anxiety.

As he started to progress in my class, I tried to incorporate other media texts that would engage Tim based on the carnival atmosphere. Over time, with such TV shows as *Seinfeld* and *Family Guy*, I further introduced him to carnival laughter. Every show engaged him in class, and I saw a new student resurrected from his old self. Slowly, day by day, there was a distinctly positive change that was evident in his attitude and behavior in class.

**Using Music in Class**

Once I had established some sense of purpose for Tim, I decided to take the carnival spirit one step further and use music in class as a way to continue to reduce any lingering fear and anxiety. I approached music with caution, but was reassured by Murphey (1992), a pioneer in SLA research on popular songs and ESOL pedagogy. He proposes that songs are useful in the ESOL classroom because of the benefits they offer to all ELLs at all levels. Murphey conducted an

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**Intrigued by the possibilities, I made an assumption that some of Bakhtin’s dialogical, carnival process could reduce Tim’s fear and anxiety.**
analysis of the lyrics of a large corpus of pop songs and found that they have several features that aid language learners in getting a handle on grammatical forms (Lems, 2001).

I started by using a simple selection of music with melody and lyrics that could reduce Tim’s remaining social distance and fear. I first introduced simple nursery songs, such as “Head and Shoulders,” teaching him about body parts in a low-stress environment. To my surprise, the next day he pointed to his head and repeatedly said “head” to inform me that he had a headache! Thus convinced that this low-stress musical technique had resulted in some language acquisition, I believed more strongly than ever that there may be a positive correlation between Bakhtin’s (1982) ideas and my students’ success. Other songs I used in class, such as “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” reduced anxiety due to their silliness.

During the winter, I used seasonal songs to teach students about the culture of their adopted country. After learning a song about Christmas, one student kept repeating “tree” and “star,” thus aiding in his vocabulary skills. He also gave me a present at the end of the term, saying “Merry Christmas!” as he presented it to me. Because of this success, I firmly believe that music can provide the carnival environment that lowers the affective filter and allows students to feel comfortable engaging in class.

All in all, Bakhtin’s (1982) unusual critical theories helped Tim recover from social distance and culture shock in my class. Slowly, I noticed his unique smile appear on his face more often, and he became willing to engage in the learning process with other students. After a month, he was on the road to full recovery and integration into our school and society. I was optimistic that he would continue to engage more and more in the classroom and in society, ensuring further acquisition of the target language.

References


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Learning From Adversity

Prior to this, during class presentations, whenever students would forget their lines and stare for a few seconds, I would often say, “Oh! You forgot your line. OK, next student please.” My experience in the play made me empathize with students that, as a learner, I had no inhibitions using the Japanese language at any given opportunity.

Linguistic, psychological, and sociolinguistic barriers and a host of other issues stand between learners and language acquisition. Overcoming these barriers is paramount to learning a foreign language. For example, many Japanese learners of English have good reading and writing skills, but their inability or refusal to speak seems to be the nemesis of formal language instructional style.

Fluency is the ability to speak with the result that learners are reluctant to speak English, either because of fear of generating faulty sentences or because they simply lack the vocabulary to sustain a conversation—the language teacher has the responsibility to promote fluency by stressing word volume at the expense of accuracy.

Fluency is the ability to speak without hesitation, a performance descriptor for oral assessment of foreign language learners, and an indicator of progress in language learning (Chambers, 1997; Nunan, 1999). Even where fluency and accuracy are considered inseparable for beginning-level foreign language learners, I think they should be treated as separate entities that could intertwine later in the language learning curve.

With those shouts of “Okon, Okon, you forgot
your line!” still haunting me 3 years later, I resolved to turn any adversity I experience as a language learner into an effective teaching tool. Having created a classroom atmosphere in which undergraduate students are sufficiently primed with “sweet nothings” (see “Tuning Learners Up With ‘Sweet Nothings’ in the Language Classroom,” Essential Teacher, December 2008), developing fluency became my priority. My idea was that improving second language (L2) fluency would make learners hunger for more vocabulary, and the quest for accuracy might be the next logical step.

Use of the first language (L1) in a foreign language classroom, although frowned on by some, can bring about improved L2 fluency among learners, provided that it is used creatively. “L2 shower” proponents who believe that learners should be exposed to torrents of the target language in the classroom at all times may not agree with this supposition. But this article does not endorse use of the L1 as an instructional medium, only as a learning support tool. I do believe that EFL classroom communication should be in the target language.

However, I offer a cautious reminder that spraying strong jets of water on emerging seedlings may in fact kill, rather than nurture, the young plants. Similarly, uncontrolled bombardment of beginning-level learners with the target language could trigger a firewall, rendering the learners impervious to the new language.

Learning While Having Fun in the Hot Seat

To use students’ L1 to promote L2 fluency in my classroom, I challenge them to a 60-second contest in which I speak in Japanese for 60 seconds on any class-nominated topic. (Disclaimer: This activity is only suitable for teachers whose ability in students’ L1 is that of a beginner or advanced beginner.) Afterwards, my challenger speaks on the same topic in English. Whoever produces more words is the winner. The activity is duly called “60 Seconds in the Hot Seat With Okon.”

Two chairs are placed in the front of the classroom, one for me and one for the student challenger. A video camera is set up and ready to record. Students in the “audience” take turns timing and filming us.

Before sitting in the hot seat, students individually write topics on pieces of paper with their names on the reverse side. They check with each other to ensure that there are no repetitions. These topics are collected, folded, and put into a bag. To commence the activity, I say a random number, and whoever that number corresponds to in the attendance register is the first to appear on the hot seat. The student comes to the front and takes his or her seat beside me, shakes the bag containing the topics, and, without looking, picks one. Whatever is written on that piece of paper becomes the topic of discussion. The student whose name appears on the reverse side of the paper is the next in the hot seat. This way, no student gets to discuss his or her suggested topic.

I often use the last 25 minutes of class for this activity. It is a nice way to end the class and could involve up to five students per session. The potential hilarity associated with this activity is so great that, even when the bell chimes, students are reluctant to leave the classroom. It is an enthralling live
comedy show in which participants are unconsciously developing greater fluency. Accuracy is left on the back burner because nobody bothers with mistakes. Emphasis is on talking with minimal pauses, word or phrase repetition does not count toward the final verdict, and any issues arising from the student’s or my utterances are subsequently discussed in English right after each show. My 1 minute of speaking in the students’ L1 could generate 5 or more minutes of class discussion in the L2. It creates an opportunity for natural conversation conducted in a relaxed manner; authentic language samples are used, and learners are encouraged to employ discourse markers where possible.

Finding Out About Each Other

This activity also helps learners see some issues from global and cultural perspectives because I always try to approach each topic with the target language culture as well as my personal background in mind. I also notice that some students start by incorporating some of my utterances into their discussion and gradually change into their own original story.

For example, when the topic of pets was discussed, I mentioned that I do not keep animals as pets because my wife is my pet. Some girls took great exception to that and asked me to justify why I reduced my wife to animal status. In the follow-up discussion in English, they listed the various things they do with their pets, such as cuddling, kissing, and playing. I told them that I do exactly the same with my wife every day and that having a pet would mean rationing my affection. They reasoned with me, having justified my comment from the standpoint of love, care, and affection.

Another day, when zoos were the topic, I told the class that my village in Nigeria can never maintain a zoo because we eat all kinds of animals, and as such the zookeepers would wake up one morning and not find any animals left in the zoo. When it was all quiet, one boy then announced that he now knew why I cannot keep a pet.

The fun comes not just from the topic, but also from language usage. Whenever I lack the vocabulary to discuss a chosen topic, I digress or ramble on, blaming the student for suggesting such a difficult topic. The important thing is to keep talking. This attribute rubs off on my challengers as they put a great deal of effort into making sure there is no lull until the 60 seconds has elapsed.

There is no guilt associated with using a minuscule bit of L1 to initiate a chain of classroom events with such high entertainment value and the added benefit of improving L2 fluency. Activities should go beyond mere classroom procedures and help learners figure out how they can use language to express themselves as social beings and to comprehend the world around them (see “How Mainstream Teachers Learn From English Language Learners,” Essential Teacher, March 2009).

Activities should go beyond mere classroom procedures and help learners figure out how they can use language to express themselves as social beings and to comprehend the world around them.

References

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When I first went to South Korea, I was surprised by just how many foreigners there were. Although I wasn’t in Seoul, the capital, Busan was still quite big, and almost everywhere I went I met a foreign teacher. Foreign teachers come to South Korea under the auspices of a number of different programs, ranging from universities, to summer schools, to hogwons (private academies or institutes), to the public school system. Each of these venues presents a different teaching environment, and each has its own pros and cons.

I began teaching in the public school system, which offered what seemed like a particular drawcard for many novice teachers: a Korean coteacher present in the classroom. Whilst this coteacher can offer a number of benefits, is this really a help, or is it a hindrance?

Native-English-speaking (NES) teachers have many positive stories about their experiences with their Korean coteachers, and I was fortunate in this respect. However, on the odd occasion, things don’t go smoothly. One reason for this is that, for many schools, this is their first experience having an NES teacher on staff, and the system is not well defined. From my experience, a better understanding of the roles of the coteacher would be particularly helpful to those unfortunate enough to find themselves in this situation and also for those unfamiliar with English language teaching in the South Korean public school system. This enriched understanding could help them define their roles and implement the most effective strategies for ensuring a smooth-running operation.

The Coteacher’s Roles

During my time working in this public school system, I recognised three distinctive roles of the Korean coteacher, representing both direct and indirect involvement in language teaching. The first and most obvious is what many consider to be the primary role of the coteacher. It is widely accepted that this person will not be directly involved in the teaching of language in the classroom, but will provide disciplinary support to the NES teacher. Given the differences in cultures, expectations of students can vary greatly between NES teachers’ ideas of discipline—and the effective response to lapses—and the South Korean establishment’s equivalent expectations.

As those already working within the South Korean system are aware, corporal punishment is still used by Korean teachers. Although local governments have all made overtures towards the eradication of this practice, the reality does not always match. At my school, this type of punishment definitely occurred, although among the English faculty it was not really an issue. Certainly, teachers at other schools would often tell stories of punishment being meted out and show photos of welts and bruises on students.

A report to the U.N. Human Rights Committee (Newell, 2006) states that, at the time of the report, corporal punishment was lawful within the South Korean educational system and supported by various acts of the country’s Parliament. It also cites research carried out in 2003, indicating that out of 10,381 schools, 7,536 allowed staff to carry out corporal punishment against students. The South Korean government’s response to this situation used expressions such as “educational corporal punishment” to differentiate between what it considered necessary and unnecessary forms of corporal punishment.

Because this type of discipline is a foreign concept to many young foreign teachers, including myself, clearly the South Korean Ministry of Education has recognised that we who work as language teachers in government classrooms require assistance in implementing Korean disciplinary strategies.

Within my classroom, my Korean coteacher also provided educational support, fulfilling a more direct role in language teaching. Effective interac-
tive classroom strategies dictate that using both teachers would lead to a more preferable student-to-teacher ratio. With my classes regularly consisting of at least 25–30 students, secondary support from the coteacher proved especially useful, particularly during activities and in identifying students experiencing difficulties and who required special attention with their studies.

A less glamorous role for the Korean coteacher (and one that most NES teachers would prefer not to need, particularly in an immersion classroom like mine) is inevitably that of translator. The complexity of certain tasks, relative to the students’ abilities, sometimes requires further instruction. This was compounded by the varying levels of student ability within my classroom, from those who spent hours at an afterschool academy enhancing their language skills to those who spent the majority of their time in a PC Bang (an Internet or gaming café).

**Effective or Not?**

Given the importance that South Korean society places on social stratification, the position of the teacher is considered very highly. So, too, is the need for rules and regulations. Many times I wondered if this society and culture would be lost without them! Within the framework of the developing mind, these factors are no less important, and perhaps even more so. My own experiences in the South Korean public school system have shown that students become uncharacteristically unfocused without structure and thus find it difficult to understand what is expected of them.

When I began, I used a highly student-centered approach to language teaching, whereby students would take a level of ownership of their classroom and decide on activities and methods themselves—with guidance, of course. However, they seemed unable to provide their own boundaries and determine what was socially acceptable behaviour when dealing with a foreign teacher, particularly in the early stages, and it took time for them to understand this system.

Whilst the Korean coteacher was present to provide those boundaries, I found this situation counterproductive. The coteacher being present to administer discipline effectively diminished my authority as the NES teacher, thereby undermining the level of respect that would normally have been accorded to me as a teacher within South Korean society. Although this was not always an issue, during situations when the coteacher was unavailable to assist in the classroom, the classroom could, and often did, quickly descend into chaos, at least in the early days.

This was a lesson that I learnt early, and I very quickly put an end to the Korean coteacher’s authority in my classroom. This, in itself, was not an easy task. As most people who have worked in the public school environment in South Korea can tell, whilst Korean teachers in the school may well be very polite, friendly, and respectful to foreign teachers, there is clearly a perception by many, particularly the older teachers, that foreign teachers are not “real” teachers and are there purely to substitute for and support the Korean teachers in the classroom.

Extricating the coteacher from the classroom, and reassuring him or her that I was competent enough and that I would survive, was a challenge.

Extricating the coteacher from the classroom, and reassuring him or her that I was competent enough and that I would survive, was a challenge, but there was no better way than by proving my competency in the classroom whilst the coteacher was there. The key, then, was to ensure that the students were aware that I was the sole authority in my classroom. Once I had established this, I found that the coteacher could be effectively reintroduced into the classroom environment, albeit within the framework of the new power dynamics.

By shifting the power within the classroom to me, I also became responsible for developing a disciplinary plan with which I felt more comfortable. It took some time for the students to realise that corporal punishment would no longer be used, and in the early days it almost seemed...
like they were desirous of it, so entrenched had it become in their psyche. But eventually they responded to this new environment.

Regarding the secondary role of the Korean coteacher, there can be little doubt that halving the student-to-teacher ratio had a positive effect, particularly during activities and highly interactive sessions. A number of studies have proven the effectiveness of a greater teacher-to-student ratio, and this has been recommended for ESL classrooms as well. For example, the Missouri Migrant Education and English Language Learning Center recommends that lower to mid-level learners at the middle school level should be in classrooms with a student-to-teacher ratio of 10:1 to 15:1 (Suggested Instructional Time, 2006). In my class, the coteacher and I were able to achieve these ratios, which brought great relief.

In conjunction with the new power dynamics of the classroom, the Korean coteacher’s role as an “assistant” to me in the conversational classes was used often. Other NES teachers in the public school system, however, showed widespread frustration with either the lack of help from coteachers or, conversely, the coteacher playing too great a role in the classroom. With an increasing number of students in classrooms, effective teacher utilisation can clearly mean the difference between a successful or unsuccessful learning experience for students.

### What Are the Implications?

As the number of students in classrooms grows, so, too, does the disparity between students’ academic and English language ability. As in my classes, it is reasonable to assume that the class will contain students who may have great difficulty in understanding key tasks and objectives. Although used as a final resort, the Korean coteacher clearly plays an important role in ensuring that the majority of students can fully appreciate the lesson. Judie Haynes points to a number of strategies employed in the coteaching ESL environment, including teach and write, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, team teaching, and load and support (see “Two Teachers Can Be Better Than One,” Essential Teacher, September 2007).

In large classes, working to the ability of the best students is an equally bad strategy as working to the ability of those who struggle the most, particularly when there is no option of reorganising the classroom to ensure that it consists only of students with equal ability. By catering to one extreme, the teacher is effectively excluding the majority of the classroom. By targeting only the lower level students, the teacher risks having other students become disinterested in the classroom and their learning, which will lead to a number of potential problems—both academic and behavioural. Effective use of the Korean coteacher in this capacity can be, and has been for me, a welcome tool.

Having a Korean coteacher in the public school English language classroom does not have to be the traumatic experience that many foreign language teachers seem to dread. A good understanding of the coteachers’ roles can lead to effective utilisation of their skills—remembering that their role as a primary teacher is taken up during their own classes. Most Korean teachers do want NES teachers’ classes to succeed.

Both groups of teachers can help each other meet their own social expectations. Both can help develop a positive working relationship with each other. All of this will allow NES teachers to shape their own classroom dynamics and have the Korean coteachers’ skills complement their strategies. Furthermore, ensuring that students understand where the authority lies in the classroom can be the key to effective classroom management. And minimising reliance on the coteachers for discipline is crucial in asserting that the NES teachers are the primary teachers in their classrooms and thus hold the position reserved for teachers within the Confucian social structure.

### References


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According to research by Banks (2004) and Gay (2002), many mainstream teachers in the United States are not trained to understand the pedagogy necessary to teach students from diverse cultures. The predominant race and gender of U.S. education school graduates are White and female, respectively (Darling-Hammond, 2000), and information, teaching materials, and textbooks used in U.S. schools have been predominantly Eurocentric in nature. Consequently, textbooks not only exclude the accomplishments of various minority groups, but may unwittingly mischaracterize them with stereotypes and negative images as well (Loewen, 1996).

Considering cultural factors when designing curriculum and instructional materials is key to activating prior knowledge for multicultural English language learners (ELLs). If teachers are only accustomed to teaching English-speaking students from their native culture, they can’t help but lack understanding of second language acquisition as well as diverse cultural values. Cultural misunderstanding and miscommunication will color the educational experience for both teacher and student.

How can teachers from the United States gain more empathy and understanding for students from cultures other than the mainstream? How can mainstream teachers become personally familiar with trying to learn another language? One way to experience the difficulties of trying to negotiate a different culture and language is to actually try living it. Teacher educators can plant the seed of this idea early on by encouraging students in their programs to leave their comfort zones and enter a different culture. But teachers at all levels of experience and tenure should consider doing so. If no opportunities are readily available, create or develop your own short-term study-abroad program.

Study-abroad programs offer a variety of opportunities for teachers and may provide a deeper understanding of the language challenges that ELLs confront daily. Once abroad, the sojourner is placed in a set of circumstances that may be similar to that of the language learner. Negotiating luggage from a crowded international airport carousel amid hundreds of people speaking various languages will welcome you to your new country. This may be the initial wake-up call, especially if you are accustomed to the typical lifestyle that teachers lead year after year, surrounded by the four walls of a classroom. No matter which country you call home, studying abroad will open up a new world of excitement and learning to those who desire an international educational adventure.

Making It Happen

Study abroad may be long or short term in duration, but for the classroom teacher, the time commitment and funding are generally the principal determinants. Many educators may not be able to take a semester off, so let’s assume that you have 2 weeks or less to carve out of your employment or familial obligations. This makes you a perfect candidate for an “experience of a lifetime” that may change your way of thinking permanently by living, if only for a short time, in a country where your native language may be the foreign language.

Selecting a program that fits your personal and professional desires may be an adventure in itself. With today’s ubiquitous Internet access and numerous search engines, it is not difficult to find the perfect program. Going it alone may be daunting, so consider making a group effort with other educators. Excitement will grow as you discuss the details and set goals to personalize your learning opportunities. While planning, keep a positive attitude that this will be one of the best learning experiences you will have in your lifetime. When talking to others who have been involved in international study, it’s not surprising to hear that, despite some difficulties negotiating a new culture, they loved the experience and would do it again.

To make your dream a reality, take initiatives to find the right match for
your global excursion. First, you should find out from your employer whether the experience could be used for professional development credits and whether any monetary incentives to support the study experience exist. Next, check at the local university, or other educational institutions that offer study abroad, for programs that fit your personal and professional needs. These programs are also available through many foreign language and business organizations. Every program will provide a unique experience; conduct an extensive search so that you can select a venture that will fulfill your own professional development plan.

**Details to Consider**

Two important considerations that must be at the top of your list are the cost of the program and the destination. Carefully read the details of the budgeted items and the range of educational opportunities available in each program. Some programs provide hour-by-hour scheduled activities, whereas others offer freedom of choice with minimally structured experiences. Accommodations may include hotels, hostels, university dorms, and homestays. For the semester-at-sea participant, the accommodation is a ship cabin. For most adult travelers in a study-abroad program, a single en-suite room is a difficult find and costs more than other options.

Each decision impacts your funds. Going into a remote village, being housed in a family home, and eating meals with the host family will be less expensive than a hotel-and-bus touring program and might be more rewarding. The hotel living experience also seriously limits its direct dialogue with the citizenry. Regardless of what accommodation is available in your program, finding yourself in unfamiliar surroundings in a community where you are unable to easily read signs or ask simple directions may give you a glimpse of what ELLs face in even the most welcoming classroom environment.

Accommodations will determine whether your fluency in the native language becomes a barrier or an enabler for conversation and communication. Hotels isolate you from experiencing the country’s culture and language far more than staying in a hostel or university setting, especially if the university caters to large groups of visitors. In those situations, numerous languages may be heard, giving you a true global experience. Homestay accommodations may provide the greatest interaction and learning experience to become familiar with local lifestyle and customs, but this requires some command of the native language. This is another decision point in selecting the proper study-abroad program: Are you more of an adventurer or a tourist?

Language fluency will make you feel more comfortable in a foreign country. Your proficiency level makes it easy to know if you might be completely out of your comfort zone because you can’t speak the language. If you are selecting a country with which you share a common spoken language, your concerns may be lessened, but that does not mean you won’t have difficulties with the unfamiliar culture, vocabulary, or customs. This is another reminder of the effort that ELLs put forth to achieve success in a new educational environment.

Transportation to and from the host country, not to mention getting around while there, is an important consideration. An overall look at how the study-abroad program is offered will help you determine whether you prefer a package deal that leaves you with little time to explore on your own. If this is your preference, your transport concerns will be taken care of as you sit back and enjoy the ride. A program that gives you the freedom to trav-
el independently may place you in more unusual situations while you are trying to read speed limit and directional signs. Add those potential complications to, say, driving on the “other” side of the road, and it might resemble comparable feelings that ELLs experience while navigating a new educational system.

If you take the study-abroad course for university credit, scrutinize the course syllabus for the academic expectations. Will you have adequate time to commit to working toward successful completion of assignments? An academically rich study-abroad program will stimulate your curiosity about the differences and similarities of the host country and population. Visiting tourist attractions usually becomes part of that educational experience, which adds a dimension that is distinct from reading a book about the event or historic site. A daily journal-writing activity makes it easier to reflect on and recall the details of the adventure, documents the learning experience, and gives you a foundation for discussing the study trip with others.

Nothing is more important than learning about local currency. It can take a great deal of concentration to understand the currency exchange rates and recognize the different coins and paper bills that you will encounter. Again, you are placing yourself in a situation that ELLs in the United States commonly encounter when purchasing necessities for daily life. When you conquer the monetary differences, you will soon feel like an accomplished spender—at least until you hit the next country with a different currency.

The Benefits

The time away from your home may seem too short, or interminably long, but you will quickly understand that being removed from your comfort zone allows you to deal with life experiences from a different perspective. You will begin to realize that you have been taken into a foreign lifestyle that is likely to make you feel similar to the ELLs in your classroom. Each component of a study-abroad program is only a small part of the learning experience. Gaining insight into the history, language, and culture of each nation visited allows time for reflection into your own beliefs about international conditions and concerns. Even the smallest interaction with a native of a particular country will enable you to have a personal investment in the lifestyle of that country.

Study abroad is more than a 2-week educational experience. It may change how you see the world for the rest of your life and give you new perspective on helping ELLs overcome the same barriers you faced when you were in a foreign country. Therefore, keep an open mind about all the possibilities that could bring new meaning and understanding into your life. Search for the program that is just right for your budget and will take you to the country or countries of choice, and then sign your name on the dotted line. You will never regret the personal growth that will take place during this life-altering experience, and it may influence your teaching in ways that you never thought possible.

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Roberta K. Weber is an associate professor specializing in instructional design at Florida Atlantic University, in the United States.

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See also “Gino Learns to Play Kickball: Bridging the Cultural Gap Between Teachers and English Language Learners,” www.tesol.org/et/.
The village of Kwigillingok, Alaska, has one school that serves all K–12 students in the area. Students are taught in Yup’ik, their native language, through second grade, at which point English is integrated into the classroom. By high school, the level of English proficiency varies greatly among students. Developing challenging and engaging learning experiences for them is an ongoing process. Therefore, studying topics that have a high level of relevancy is key. Climate change is one of those topics.

Climate change is one of the dominant themes in today’s global society and is likely to be so for the foreseeable future. The scientific foundation, human impacts, and potential solutions associated with global climate change make it an ideal context for interdisciplinary teaching. Given their location, the effects of climate change have special meaning to the Yup’ik high school students as they see, every day, the direct effects of it in their own backyards.

We thought that a project touching on these students’ own experiences with climate change would be a good way to engage them in science and improve their English literacy. In this article, we describe the project, “The Effects of Climate Change on Living Things,” and highlight some climate change resources we found useful in developing the materials.

Addressing Standards
The project’s learning objectives included several of Washington State’s Essential Academic Learning Requirements (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.): 1.1, prewrites to generate ideas and plan writing; 1.5, publishes text to share with an audience; 2.1, adapts writing for a variety of audiences; 3.1, develops ideas and organizes writing; 3.2, uses appropriate style. The project also addressed the National Research Council’s (1996) National Science Education Standards A (science as inquiry), C (life science), and F (science in personal and social perspectives). It also addressed the following Standards for the English Language Arts (International Reading Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 1996):

- Standard 7: Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- Standard 8: Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
- Standard 10: Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
- Standard 11: Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
- Standard 12: Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

The Structure of the Project
The project was informed by a 2-week curricular unit for high schools developed by Facing the Future, which is called Climate Change: Connections and Solutions. A complete version of this unit can be downloaded free of charge from Facing the Future’s web site (www.facingthefuture.org). The section of the unit that we based our A project touching on these students’ own experiences with climate change would be a good way to engage them in science and improve their English literacy.
project on helps students learn about the potential impacts of climate change on living things in a variety of ecosystems. Students then communicate these impacts to their school community through informative posters or other media.

Students were assigned to take three or four photos of direct evidence of climate change that they see in their village. This first part of the project returned amazing results: Students captured everything from houses sinking into the permafrost to birds and animals that have had their migratory patterns altered. Not surprisingly, this part of the project really engaged the students.

Following the picture-taking portion, we gave students some writing prompts related to their photos. For example, we asked them to explain why they photographed what they did and how this was an illustration of climate change. Then we asked them about what worries them most in terms of seeing their village and their way of life succumb to such changes. Finally, we had them describe what they felt was worth preserving in Kwigillingok and who should be told about it.

**Issues Highlighted by Students**

For the majority of the students, the melting of the permafrost was the most immediate concern. One student commented, “The melting of the permafrost causes hills, houses, and other buildings to sink.” Another student wrote about how the local seagulls were lingering into November and December, whereas in the past they would be gone by then and not foraging for food: “It is unusual for them to still be here, which suggests that [the ground] is not as cold as it looks.”

When asked what worried them about the current condition of the permafrost (and, consequently, the landscape of the village and the stability of their homes), one student wrote, “We don’t have a lot of money. We need to stay near the ocean so we can fish. We don’t want to have to move farther and farther back each year. We can’t leave, but we can’t stay, either.” This sentiment was shared by another student, who wrote, “If we don’t do something, we could lose this beautiful land that we have lived in for thousands of years—forever.”

As for who should be told about this very real problem, one student commented, “Please let your [university] students understand that what they do down where they live greatly affects the way we live up here! This is a global issue—it will reach everyone soon.” Other students wanted to tell the government or other villages similar to theirs.

For the final presentation, the students decided to create a movie with Apple’s iMovie software to showcase their photos and writing. The target audience was preservice teachers at the Woodring College of Education at Western Washington University. In the movie, students read their writing aloud—in English and their native Yup’ik—to make an even greater impact on their audience. One student even provided a musical score using the keyboard in his English classroom. The result was a 4-minute documentary about the effects that global warming is having on just one fishing village along the coast of the Bering Sea (www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4qPa2xIU4o).

To help students with the project, we provided “Ecosystem Role Cards,” which are included in the Facing the Future climate change unit. The cards included descriptions of climate change’s impacts on “Arctic Plants” and “Humans in the Arctic.” We used them to help students generate ideas about what to photograph and write about. These kids really related to the symptoms listed on the cards, such as erosion of coastal lands, thawing permafrost, and soil instability, because these are things they see around them all the time.

**Assessment**

For the assessment, we used the 6-trait analytic rubric developed by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, which includes ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. After students wrote their paragraphs describing the photographs they had taken, we informally analyzed them using the 6 traits. Due to the analytic nature of these traits, scores were initially assigned to certain ones

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(in this case, ideas, voice, and word choice) and then each written piece was assessed as a whole.

Analytic assessment is frequently used in the formative stages of writing, so we used it as a guideline rather than a summative, holistic assessment. Because of this, students felt that they had more control over their final outcome and were quite successful in reaching their target audience—the preservice teachers with whom they were corresponding. This was a unique concept to the high school students, who were used to writing for only one audience (the teacher) and being assigned a final letter grade. In this case, the final grade was the effect that their documentary had on the preservice teachers.

After viewing the movie, we asked the preservice teachers to answer several questions about what they had just seen. One question in particular struck a chord with them. When asked “As a future teacher, what effect does using the first-person narrative have on how you will approach your curriculum?” the responses were unanimous. The preservice teachers recognized that they need to value the backgrounds that their students will bring with them to the classroom, and understand that how they teach is just as important (if not more so) that what they teach.

This positive feedback has inspired us to expand this project to include even more student voices on the critical topic of climate change and the fact that its effects are real and affecting students across this circumpolar region in Alaska.

Additional Resources

You don’t have to be an expert on climate change to implement a unit like this. The following Web sites include useful information on climate change, up-to-date data sets, and ready-to-go curricular resources:

- **Climate Classroom** (www.climateclassroom.org): On this site, created by the National Wildlife Federation, you can download the excellent slideshow “What’s Up With Global Warming?” (in the For Kids section).
- **Greenhouse Gas Emissions** (www.epa.gov/climatechange/emissions/): This section of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s climate change Web site gives an overview of greenhouse gases, greenhouse gas inventories, and emission trends and projections.
- **Basic Information on Greenhouse and Related Gases** (http://gaw.kishou.go.jp/wdgg/gas.html): The Japan Meteorological Agency’s World Data Centre for Greenhouse Gases Web site provides basic information on numerous greenhouse gases.
- **Facing the Future** (www.facingthefuture.org): This site offers free downloadable units on climate change as well as activities and materials on global sustainability. It also includes a Curriculum Finder that assists in quickly finding materials appropriate for specific grade levels and subject areas.

References


Wendy Church is the executive director of Facing the Future, a national educational organization based in Seattle, Washington, in the United States.

Lauren McClanahan is an associate professor of education in the Secondary Education Department of the Woodring College of Education at Western Washington University, in the United States.
Many of the Japanese EFL university students that I teach believe the key to communicating successfully in English lies in mastering grammar rules and memorizing vocabulary words. Therefore, they spend huge amounts of time studying syntax and concentrating on hundred-dollar words. Although I greatly admire their pluck, I feel that they are not making progress proportional to their efforts.

To help even the linguistic score, and to give these students a chance to engage in more meaningful language exchange, I have introduced a series of tasks into my classroom. Following Willis’s (1996) framework, the tasks involve collaborative and meaning-focused interaction, engage learners’ interests, have an outcome, and relate to real-world activities.

One task that students particularly enjoy involves student-generated minisurveys (SGMs). Surveys are manageable for learners at most levels and offer a good platform for language practice and the use of previously acquired structures and words. I use SGMs to reinforce students’ use of interrogative questions and to recycle comparative and superlative forms in a communicative way.

Surveys are a familiar feature of campus life, which makes the job of explaining how they work an easy one. SGMs provide learners with a chance to select an area of interest and find out more about how their peers feel about it. Building a task sequence around designing questionnaires, collecting and analyzing data, and preparing reports and presentations gives students the communication practice they need without compromising any of the time they’ve spent concentrating on vocabulary and grammar.

This article deals with an oral communication class I taught at Setsuman University, in Osaka, Japan. The class consisted of 32 second-year language majors whose average age was 20. Although they had been studying English since middle school, their focus had been primarily on grammar translation and memorization, with very few opportunities for communicative language encounters.

Involving Students in Every Phase of the Task

My task cycle usually took 3 weeks to complete. The first week was devoted to explaining the task, selecting the topic, and writing survey questions; the second week focused on data gathering and analysis; and the third week was for presentation of reports.

As a pretask warm-up, I conducted an informal survey of my own by asking students a question (e.g., “Do you think the legal driving age in Japan should be lower or higher?”) and having them respond by raising their hands. I then tallied the answers on the board and followed up by asking those students who responded “higher” to say how much higher, and those students who said “lower,” how much lower. Finally, I drew a bar graph on the board that depicted their responses. This step helped demonstrate how surveys work and helped students get into the mind frame of doing survey research.

Next, I divided students into groups of three or four and asked them to brainstorm possible survey topics of their own. Past themes had included cafeteria food preferences, cell phone features and functions, dating rituals, hobbies, and part-time jobs.

Once students had generated a list of topics, they needed to choose one. They could then start writing out their survey questions and prepare for the next phase, canvassing friends and schoolmates. Groups had to try to produce anywhere...
from 8 to 15 survey questions, depending on their proficiency, as in the following example produced by a student in my class:

1. Do you buy a school lunch or bring a lunch box?
2. What is your favorite menu in lunchroom? Why?
3. What is your don't like menu in lunchroom? Why?
4. What foods do you wish you can buy?
5. How much money do you spend your lunch a day?
6. Do you try new dish sometimes?
8. About size, is it okay for you?
9. Do you drink a tea at lunch?

I tried to keep the task instructions loose enough to encourage student creativity and freedom, but I was strict about the requirements. For example, students had to include both open- and closed-ended questions, have a minimum number of survey respondents, and design and produce at least one visual aid from survey data for each member of their group. They were also required to present their survey results orally (and occasionally in writing) to the class.

Survey development can take up as much or as little class time as you wish; however, I tried to limit the amount of preparation time we spent in class. There are two reasons for this: I wanted students to work autonomously outside of class, and the reports and presentations phase of the task would be more interesting if students didn’t know beforehand what their peers’ topics would be.

Once students had gathered their data and started reviewing it, they started planning their reports. Unfortunately, this is around the time when groups start to lose motivation for the task and burn out. The fun of querying friends and schoolmates is over, and the job of writing up and presenting on their findings may seem overwhelming at first.

Keeping Students Motivated

One way to reinvigorate students is to introduce them to the notion of individual accountability. This means that each participant is responsible for contributing to the learning and success of the group (Jacobs, Power, & Loh, 2002). I tried to encourage groups to work cooperatively, but I also encouraged students to work to their strengths. For example, computer-savvy students might design their group’s graphs or visual aids while other members work to write out what they plan to say. Groups rarely needed much prodding from me once momentum started to build again. Here is another student sample, taken from the same project that produced the list of questions included earlier:

Many people (24) answered “curry” as their favorite food said its reason is that they like that taste on dish. Also is big size, cheap price, delicious taste. And many people did answer a Chinese noodles too. Reasons are cheap price, big size and taste. These points must be important for the staffs of a lunchroom. As for fish, many people (17) answered it as don’t like.

When the day finally arrived for students to present their survey results, I left extra time for follow-up questions. Presentation sessions quickly got lively as students unveiled their topics and showed off their visual aids. I like for groups to take turns presenting to other groups, but individual groups presenting for the entire class would be an exciting way to manage the task, too. I have also used sign-up sheets to determine the order of speakers.

After all of the groups presented, I played recordings of native speakers asking and answering survey questions. I asked learners to listen and then match questions with answers or to write out questions for the answers they heard. This type of intensive listening practice exposed them to authentic language (Nunan, 2004) and provided a good segue into the final phase of the task during which we focused on linguistic elements.
Focus on Communication and Meaning, not Grammar

Up until this point, students had been focused on getting their meaning across in a variety of communicative settings. They had not been thinking about, nor had I mentioned, anything related to grammatical accuracy. Perhaps during the preparation and report phases, their focus had been on accuracy, but meaning was still prominent in their minds. The last phase was designed to help students look at how meaning is usually conveyed in English.

For example, I sometimes asked students to listen again to the survey recordings and note the intonation contours for different question types. As a follow-up, they could use cue words to write questions and answers involving quantity terms (e.g., “How many times a week do you go eat in the lunchroom?”, “Do you always eat those kinds of things?”, “Would you like more variety?”).

Another option for the final phase was to focus on mistakes students made leading up to or during their reports. I took notes while monitoring students’ production during their group discussions or during their presentations. I also focused on students’ visual aids. I tried to select a mix of grammatical and lexical errors because students seemed to respond well to focusing on these areas. I also made note of instances when students used words, phrases, and chunks of language effectively in their reports and interactions. I found that focusing on this positive aspect of their output encouraged creative thinking and future risk taking.

Whenever possible, I tried to round out sequences with some type of real-life encounter. This could mean writing a letter, persuading a school official to drop by class, or inviting a product spokesperson to come in and hear students’ ideas and comment on them. The following three excerpts, taken from students’ draft letters to the school’s cafeteria cooking staff, illustrate the possibilities for meaningful real-life language encounters:

- In lunchtime, there are many types of dishes in the lunchroom. Many are not popular to the students and don’t get choiced. In other words, we can see dishes on a day we don’t want.
- Some students did say they want to eat different foods more such as fried chicken, pizza, fried potato, fruits, and Chinese foods. If the staffs make these foods they can sell them easily on a day.
- As for balance, such as healthy foods nobody care about that a lot. Maybe they eat a healthy foods in their home or their room.

Another benefit of using SGMs is improved group dynamics, including those related to negotiating skills and classroom climate. Research into task-based EFL teaching (e.g., Ellis, 2003) shows that student interaction is at the heart of communication and, when properly set up, can promote greater intrinsic motivation, heighten self-esteem, and foster altruistic relationships. Furthermore, SGMs can cast light on topics that are otherwise difficult or touchy subjects for teachers to introduce in the classroom.

Taboo topics such as tattoos, hostess clubs, or underground rave parties are all examples of past survey topics suggested by students in my classes. Compared to conventional grammar translation activities and other rote learning activities, SGMs are more effective in putting communication and meaningfulness together to develop students’ language skills. Through exchanging ideas, interacting, and influencing one another, students not only improve their language skills but also learn about the world around them and the people in it. This communicative, collaborative, and integrative task helps students become more confident and successful learners.

Special thanks to Hitomi, Saori, and Eri for permission to use portions of their SGMs in this article.

References


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Teaching English language learners (ELLs) presents the challenge of finding topics and materials that sustain interest, engage participation, and provide a rich linguistic context for development in all skill areas. This is not an easy task, especially considering that the ELLs in my intensive English program (IEP) are young adult learners from diverse backgrounds who are accustomed to receiving information in short sound bites.

However, I recently came upon a project, Pennies for Peace, which became a service learning experience that captured students’ attention and helped them improve their language skills on a level I had never before experienced.

The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2005–2008) defines service learning as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (¶ 1). In recent years, service learning has been integrated into the curriculum in colleges and universities as well as in elementary and secondary schools. Although much has been written about service learning in traditional K–12 and higher education classrooms with native speakers, less has been written about incorporating it into curricula for ELLs (Elwell & Bean, 2001).

One educational setting that stands to benefit enormously from instruction that includes a service learning component is the ESOL classroom. This article describes just such a project in an IEP that won accolades from all participants.

A Daring Idea

In our IEP, Tuesday and Thursday afternoons are devoted to Special Topics classes developed by the classroom teachers. In the spring of 2008, I was contemplating the course design for a May/June Special Topics class. Having just read *Three Cups of Tea* (Mortenson & Relin, 2006), the remarkable story of Greg Mortenson’s work to build schools in the mountains of Pakistan and Afghanistan, I was inspired to contribute to his cause.

One of his fund-raising campaigns, Pennies for Peace, was established to help schoolchildren learn about children from other cultures while making a contribution to their education. I wondered whether my IEP students would accept the challenge to learn about Mortenson’s school project and solicit money for his campaign. It seemed like a daring idea. Would students find the challenge interesting enough to stick with it for the 3–4 weeks needed to complete the project? How would they react to soliciting money when in many of their cultures only beggars ask for money? Would the faculty and staff be receptive enough to ensure the project’s success? This was an out-of-the-box idea, but I decided to try it.

Preparation and Buy-In

During the May/June session, few native-English-speaking students are on campus. So I thought it was imperative to create a context in which the IEP students could communicate with those who were available, namely, members of the faculty and staff. Soliciting money for Pennies for Peace would provide a meaningful purpose for such interaction, but I knew I had to “hook” the students, to secure their buy-in, for the project to succeed.

I began by showing them photos of Mortenson with Pakistani students and asking them to guess his occupation. Curious to learn the truth, the students searched the Internet for answers to the questions of who, what, where, and when. The students shared their findings, and their interest was piqued as to why and how

One student called me aside to report that some fellow classmates were feeling anxious about soliciting donations. Had I crossed cultural boundaries with this challenge?
Mortenson was building schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

I then divided students into groups to do more in-depth reading. One group investigated Mortenson’s biography, another researched the details of his project, and a third group reported on his accomplishments. Based on this research, the groups designed posters with key information and presented their findings to their classmates. Thus, each group was fully informed about Mortenson and his work and prepared to retell his story to the faculty and staff.

To include an authentic listening comprehension activity, I showed students the 10-minute video about the Pennies for Peace campaign provided by Mortenson’s Central Asia Institute. The video, narrated by Mortenson’s teenage daughter, and an accompanying worksheet I designed provided appropriate aural input and additional motivation for the project.

A Moment of Doubt

At this point, I thought the students were sufficiently ready for and enthusiastic about their task. They had rehearsed their presentations and seemed comfortable with the information. But a moment of doubt emerged. One student called me aside to report that some fellow classmates were feeling anxious about soliciting donations. Had I crossed cultural boundaries with this challenge? Should I abandon the project? I began to question the wisdom of my choice.

Fortunately, my planning included securing buy-in from the faculty and staff as well. I had sent out an e-mail informing the campus community of my intentions, explaining the linguistic and service learning objectives of the project. I suggested that they e-mail me if they preferred not to have students visit them, but the e-mail responses were all affirmative.

The faculty and staff supported the idea enthusiastically and assured me that they would welcome the students into their offices. As one staff member replied, “I think it’s very important that we reach out to our foreign students, and sometimes I don’t think we do enough, so I’m glad you’ve given us this opportunity.” From another office I received this encouragement: “Our staff would love to participate in the Pennies for Peace fund-raising event. We look forward to the presentation.”

When I shared these and other e-mail messages with the students, their anxiety disappeared. Armed with campus maps and accompanied by native-English-speaking student assistants familiar with office locations, the groups set out with canisters decorated with the Pennies for Peace logo, ready to put their oral language skills to work.

Outcomes and Evaluation

Coincidently, the day the students canvassed for donations, I was away attending a service learning conference. Recognizing the benefit of reflection with regard to service learning (Grassi, Hanley, & Liston, 2004; Heuser, 1999), and admittedly being too eager to wait 5 days to learn how the students viewed their experience, I asked them to e-mail me that evening to tell me about it. Here are a few unedited excerpts from their messages:

- I was proud of my team members as well as myself. I can’t explain my feel how I can do this project. We did such a good job in terms of not only explaining pennies of peace as using English but also helping poor as collecting pennies. (Helena, South Korea)
- They were very impressive how this man has helped those kids and also they could not stop to say that our English was incredible. (Carlos, Venezuela)
- I had a lot of fun with collecting pennies, and this experience also improved my English a lot and let me have confidence. (Min Kyung, South Korea)
- At first, we were a little bit nervous, but we stimulated each other and we did our best and proud of ourselves. It was one of my valuable things here. (Yunmi, South Korea)

When I next met the students in class, to encourage further discussion I tapped into the thoughts they had expressed in their e-mail messages. I learned, for example, that one group felt that they had been completely unprepared for their first stop. They said they had failed to introduce themselves and to determine who would present each segment of the presentation. They regrouped before moving on and were far more successful at the second stop. This teamwork is evidence of one of the benefits of service learning: “It generates many opportunities for students to develop leadership and problem-solving skills” (Russell, 2007, p. 770).

Furthermore, one student reported that his fluency improved as he went from office to office, and he knew that repetition of the same material was helping his oral language skills.

One student reported that his fluency improved as he went from office to office, and he knew that repetition of the same material was helping his oral language skills.
Moving from informal e-mail, to oral discussion, to more formal reflection papers enabled students to build on their ideas and achieve success with the final product.

His observation and self-analysis corroborated Heuser’s (1999) claim that service learning improves students’ language skills in all areas because they are using the target language in an authentic context.

Unsolicited feedback from faculty and staff confirmed what students reported. Comments such as these indicate what a win-win experience this was for everyone involved:

• We SO enjoyed the students! Their English was very good, and we loved having them here.
• Just a quick note to say how wonderful it was to hear your students tell the story behind Pennies for Peace. The few of us who were here today were most impressed with their delivery.

The e-mail messages from students and faculty certainly convey the sentiment of the project, but I wanted students to record their reflections in an academic paper. So after discussing their messages in class, I asked students to develop them into reflection papers. This scaffolding of moving from informal e-mail, to oral discussion, to more formal reflection papers enabled students to build on their ideas and achieve success with the final product. The following are unedited excerpts from their papers:

• I was annoyed about going around of school because I think that people who want to donate some money can come to our classroom, but when I came back, I changed my thinking because I can meet lots of people who are affirmative, kind and were glad to meet us. (Jung Won, South Korea)
• This activity was a little bit challenging for me. Even though we practiced what we had to say, it was totally different from practicing. It was real. (Yunmi, South Korea)
• This experience let me have confidence, and as I repeated the story . . . I felt that my English was getting more fluent. Some of them asked us more information about Pennies for Peace, our life in America and study. It was also very helpful to improve my listening. (Minkyung, South Korea)
• I would say this experience was a very interesting and original way of learning. I discovered Greg Mortenson and I practiced and improved my English speaking. (Eloi, Canada)

The students’ reflections were rich in thought and language. They had a great deal to say, and they were successful in expressing themselves because there had been ample preparation and scaffolding. Their final assignment was to write letters to Mortenson explaining who they were and what they had done. The students were able to redesign their reflection papers into letters to a real person, an assignment in which they took great pride and care.

According to Minor (2001), service learning is well suited to the second language classroom because it provides a meaningful learning environment for students and promotes the values of compassion and kindness. The Pennies for Peace project certainly was well suited to my IEP students. They used reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills in an authentic setting and understood how their language had improved. They also observed U.S. attitudes toward charitable giving, saw value in the “valueless” penny, recognized the importance given to education, and felt pride in helping students across the world. The project strengthened the college community, and the donations strengthened the international community. It was a meaningful experience indeed to learn outside the box.

References


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At Hunt Middle School in Burlington, Vermont, in the United States, a new innovative collaboration has begun between middle school teachers and preservice teaching interns from nearby Saint Michael’s College. As part of an effort to reform the teacher education program at Saint Michael’s, interns in their third year of the 4-year licensure program are working with English language learners (ELLs) who have recently immigrated to Vermont from far-off countries such as Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, and Nepal as part of the federal refugee resettlement program.

At Hunt Middle School, the ELLs participate in content area classrooms and ESL classrooms throughout their school day. Their schedules vary, but they all take an ESL language and math class and a science, social studies, language arts, or math class with their mainstream counterparts. The Saint Michael’s interns help out by working with the ELLs, facilitating small-group activities, and coteaching with their middle school colleagues.

However, there is one significant difference with this school–college collaboration. Unlike other collaborations, in which interns follow or shadow teachers during their time in classrooms, this collaboration involves preservice interns following ELLs. For the Saint Michael’s interns, the goal is to understand the different learning contexts in ESL and content area classrooms from the ELLs’ perspective and to support these students in integrating language fluency with content understanding in the various disciplines (Gibbons, 2002).

Experiencing School From Students’ Perspective

Each Tuesday and Thursday morning, five Saint Michael’s interns start their day at Hunt Middle School in an ESL class with 10 ELLs from different countries and with varying language proficiency levels, as determined by the WIDA Access test. Each intern sits with two ELLs as Ms. Jacobs,* the teacher, reviews the agenda on the whiteboard and outlines the reading and writing tasks for the day. In this ESL class the focus is on developing the academic language that is used in content classes.

Once the class is over, unlike in other preservice placements, the interns do not stay in this classroom for long. When the bell rings, they collect their things and follow a pair of ELLs to the next class; some go on to social studies, some to math, and others to science.

Throughout the course of the morning, the interns follow their pair of ELLs to four classes, usually two ESL classes and two content classes. The experience is intended to give interns the unique perspective of moving through and learning in a public middle school from the point of view of an ELL. Although the focus at Hunt Middle School is to provide integrated content and language instruction, the level of each type of instruction varies from classroom to classroom (Shohany & Inbar, 2006). For instance, as one intern, Ben, noticed,

the changes from the ESL classes to the social studies class is intimidating—the difference in accommodations for Yosef is mind-blowing in the ESL class, but there are gaps that I have to make up for in the social studies class.

Like Ben, many interns see immediately how well ELLs respond to ESL teachers’ efforts to scaffold tasks by providing visuals; graphic organizers; and other sensory, graphic, and interactive supports. At times, when these teaching strategies are absent in content classrooms, the interns begin to apply strategies that they have seen used in ESL classes. Another intern, Amy, detailed how she used an interactive support in a language arts class:

I think group work is really effective. In English class I strategically integrate English learners with students that will help them understand directions and assignments. This allows for English learners to use their language authentically, as they must communicate with their peers to complete an assignment.

* All names used in this article are pseudonyms.
As Ben’s and Amy’s experiences clearly illustrate, the preservice interns are shaped by their experiences. And for many future teachers who are not ELLs themselves, having extensive experiences with these learners in structured settings can have a positive impact (Youngs & Youngs, 2001).

However, some researchers caution that extensive experience without adequate time for reflection and development of skills and knowledge to assist ELLs can perpetuate stereotypes (Lucas, 2005).

**Developing Knowledge and Skills**

For the teacher education program at Saint Michael’s College, placing interns in the field is just part of the package. In courses at the college, interns investigate the specific linguistic and cultural background and English language proficiency of the students they work with at Hunt Middle School. This knowledge is then put to use in terms of making connections with these students (Cummins, 2000) and using students’ prior language and cultural knowledge as resources to support their learning in ESL and content classrooms (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004).

Understanding where ELLs are coming from—culturally and linguistically—helps the interns develop relationships with the ELLs and make connections with the content materials for them. However, interns also learn how to provide opportunities for effective interaction (Robinson & Ellis, 2008). They develop skills to provide ELLs with multiple ways to interact with content. For example, in a science class, Tina, another intern, realized that the academic language of an infectious disease unit would be too complex for Talia, an ELL who was currently at WIDA Level 2 language proficiency. So Tina developed an interactive conversation about becoming sick and then related that conversation to the more academic language about infectious diseases.

However, it is important to remember that such ideas do not sim-
ply pop into the minds of interns. Interns spend hours working with the WIDA Model Performance Indicators to translate language objectives from content standards for units of study and lessons. The process not only involves understanding content objectives through backward planning, but also includes discourse analysis of potential resources and materials to develop specific language objectives (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005; Zwiers, 2008). In Tina’s situation, she needed to understand the science content standards for the infectious disease unit, review and analyze the language load to support the content standards and the unit’s materials and resources, and then create corresponding language objectives to support Talia in becoming conversant about illnesses and infectious diseases.

Understanding the Need for Collaboration

By being placed in this type of situation, interns not only learn from ESL and content specialists, but also create a sense of collective responsibility for educating ELLs, as highlighted by Casey:

As a future teacher I think it would be very interesting to work at Hunt Middle School. . . . I think that working with ESL students is a very big challenge but it is also a great opportunity for me. I am glad that I am able to work with these students under the guidance of a teacher that has been working with ESL students for a long time.

Through their experiences at Hunt Middle School, the Saint Michael’s interns recognize the importance of collaboration with teachers who are language specialists. Following ELLs from ESL classrooms to content area classrooms allows interns to collaborate with up to four teachers about the language, content, and learning needs of students. The interns learn the importance of not only content but also understanding the language of that content.

“After working with my students in these classrooms for the last 3 months at Hunt Middle School, I can honestly say that I see school, teaching so differently now. Tariq and Amed have changed the way I will teach.” Revelations like this one from Angela are not only inspiring, they point to a change in how interns at Saint Michael’s College think about teaching. Ben, Amy, Tina, Casey, Angela, and other interns have shifted their thinking about how to teach a particular content area such as social studies or science. They realize that in today’s schools, it’s not just about the content—it’s also about the language needs of their students.

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Language researchers and educators are increasingly recognizing the fact that English is spoken by more people as an additional language than as a mother tongue (Crystal, 1997), and there is ongoing discussion in the field of second and foreign language teaching in regard to the native speaker (NS) and nonnative speaker (NNS) dichotomy (Braine, 1999; Llurda, 2005; Medgyes, 1994; Phillipson, 1992). The expansion of the English language has led to the expansion of the field of English language teaching (ELT) all over the world, and the field has a growing number of teachers who are not native speakers of English. In fact, Canagarajah (2005) argues that nonnative-English-speaking (NNES) teachers comprise 80% of the English teachers in the world.

Yet it has become clear that implications of the NS-NNS debate in ELT include unethical, unprofessional, and discriminatory practices against NNES teachers stemming from their “nonnativeness” in a wide range of different countries, educational institutions, and contexts. Discriminatory practices in ELT prompted the TESOL organization quite a few years ago to publish a statement on hiring practices (TESOL, 1992) and, more recently, a statement highlighting the discrimination that nonnative speakers still experience in this field (TESOL, 2006).

Any kind of transformation of a group starts with individuals who represent the core of that group.

### Toward More Equity in TESOL

The developments that have occurred in ELT over the years present the theoretical underpinnings for the need for a change. Based on this need, I present guidelines (specifically for graduate students in TESOL/applied linguistics programs) for more professional practices based on three A’s:

- **Awareness**: Some members of the TESOL community may not be aware of certain practices that favor native-English-speaking (NES) teachers or ignore NNES teachers. The first step is to establish and build awareness, both of the self (as an NES or NNES teacher) and of the current situation in the field of ELT.
- **Advocacy**: The next step that will lead to change is to engage in advocacy. Starting from your own self, build a multifaceted approach to advocacy that enables you to advocate for your own situation as well as that of NNES teachers in the field and to seek opportunities for collaboration among NES and NNES teachers.
- **Activism**: After gaining awareness of and encouraging advocacy for NNES teachers, the change for more equity in ELT requires activism. Depending on the context, a teacher, a graduate student, another ELT professional, or simply a language user might promote practices that highlight the qualities of NNES teachers and the advantages of collaboration among NES and NNES teachers.

In the remainder of this article, I present a four-level guide for raising awareness, engaging in advocacy, and demonstrating activism, which I address specifically to NNES graduate students.

### Relationship With Academic Study

Any kind of transformation of a group starts with individuals who represent the core of that group. Raising awareness, encouraging advocacy, and demonstrating activism can only be actualized by individuals who have gone through the same process. As the originator of the ripple effect, NNES graduate students in ELT have a personal responsibility to develop self-awareness and self-advocacy. In other words, they should not undermine themselves as students, teachers, or English language users. The academic context in which graduate students live and function provides an array of opportunities to gain and raise awareness of issues faced by NNES teachers.
For instance, graduate coursework in TESOL/applied linguistics programs offers a chance to gain deeper understanding of these issues. Engaging in advanced readings and carrying out research studies that strategically focus on these issues are vitally important activities in developing awareness on this matter. Graduate students may even go further and seek out opportunities to share their work with a greater audience by means of academic conferences and scholarly journals.

To recap, here are some strategies that fall under this phase of activism:

• Do not undermine yourself!
• Build your coursework to focus on NNES perspectives.
• Carry out research studies on NNES teacher issues.
• Strategically engage in academic work (e.g., conference presentations, articles in scholarly and professional journals) on NNES teacher issues and advocacy.
• Struggle against any inequalities you face by tracking their sources, taking your stand against inequalities, and raising awareness among NES and NNES teachers about existing inequalities.

Relationships With Fellow Graduate Students
Establishing a network with fellow graduate students can provide some distinct opportunities to spread your activism and advocacy on NNES-related issues. Many domains in which graduate students live and function offer advocacy opportunities.

To begin with, you might establish close ties with classmates in your program and inform them about the need for more equitable practices in ELT. Community groups in the form of graduate student associations and Listservs provide a forum for doing so. You might also establish off-campus points of connection to spread your talk of activism and advocacy. Students from the same or different programs might also take part in collaborative research projects focusing on issues pertinent to NNES teachers. Developing a common platform of advocacy will also help you in your struggle against existing discriminatory practices concerning the field of ELT. Today’s graduate students are tomorrow’s teachers, faculty members, and administrators. The impact that you make should never be underestimated.

To recap, here are some strategies that fall under this phase of activism:

• Make efforts to raise awareness among NES teachers and fellow students.
• Engage in social activities (via community groups, informal gatherings, online groups, etc.).
• Seek opportunities to engage in collaborative research projects on NNES teacher issues.
• Expand collaborative advocacy to graduate students studying in other programs and at other institutions.

Relationships With Faculty
Another domain for raising awareness, engaging in advocacy, and demonstrating activism is your relationships with the faculty in your graduate program. Graduate students who can believe in change, that is, the need for more equitable hiring and working practices for nonnative-English-speaking teachers, should establish close ties with the faculty members who share the same or at least similar goals.
The current imbalance, which often unethically and unprofessionally ignores the qualities of nonnative-English-speaking teachers, favors a one-dimensional expansion of the English language teaching profession.

The importance of working with the faculty is twofold. First, it will help your voice for advocacy find a broader audience. By working with faculty, you might be presented with coauthoring or copresenting opportunities focusing on issues related to NNES teachers. Second, by engaging in dialogue about these issues with faculty, you might be able to create an undergraduate or graduate-level class that can be taught collaboratively.

To recap, here are some strategies that fall under this phase of activism:

- Work with faculty, specifically seeking coteaching, coauthoring, and copresenting opportunities.
- Engage in dialogue with faculty about possible opportunities to offer courses that directly or indirectly focus on issues and advocacy related to NNES teachers.
- Support faculty who are currently working on these issues.
- Expand your collaborative advocacy to faculty at other institutions.

Relationship With the Community

Spreading your advocacy efforts to the community on and off campus might be regarded as the last ring of the ripple effect of change. The rationale behind this phase of activism is to maximize all of the advocacy opportunities you can find. This phase is particularly important because it contributes to the systemic efforts of change.

Some strategies that fall under this phase of activism include the following:

- Work in collaboration with native and nonnative speakers who are pre- or in-service teachers.
- Participate in organizations, projects, conferences, and events that enable or encourage your advocacy efforts.
- Participate in voluntary projects such as language exchange or conversation partners with students in intensive English programs, and raise awareness of NNES teacher issues among laypersons.

The theoretical underpinnings of the NS-NNS debate create an asymmetrical power relationship that has implications for both groups. The current imbalance, which often unethically and unprofessionally ignores the qualities of NNES teachers, favors a one-dimensional expansion of the ELT profession. Yet one of the unique characteristics of the profession is the all-encompassing boundaries that welcome ethnic, racial, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity. For these reasons, ELT is at a crucial intersection.

The answer to the question “What needs to be done to overcome the existing unequal practices?” perhaps comes from the famous words of Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken.” Probably, the one less traveled by will make all the difference. To be more specific, the ELT profession will either perpetuate the existing status quo (and institutionalize the perception of favoring NES teachers in the field) or welcome NNES teachers (and perceive them as legitimate participants in the profession). The collaboration among NES and NNES teachers will form the basis for the desirable future of this profession, which can only be actualized by legitimate participation of both parties.

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English Learners in American Classrooms: 101 Questions, 101 Answers


This slim but pithy handbook is a rich and highly accessible resource for in-service and preservice teachers, parents, administrators, and laypeople interested in issues related to English language learners (ELLs) in U.S. public schools. Crawford and Krashen address important issues in a straightforward and easily comprehensible way, steering clear of overly academic narratives, discipline-specific jargon, and in-text research citations. That said, the content is firmly grounded in well-constructed and up-to-date research, and the notes at the back of the book provide an extensive listing of the research cited in each of the 101 responses. Language policy expert James Crawford and distinguished ESL scholar Stephen Krashen ask the questions that need to be answered regarding ELLs—the big and important, the contentious, the confusing, the legal, the historical and political, and even the emotional.

The authors anticipate readers’ curiosity in the 101 questions and corresponding answers, which are presented under 12 headings: Students, Programs, Pedagogy, Research, Heritage Languages, Criticisms of Bilingual Education, Public Opinion, Legal Requirements, Assessment and Accountability, Politics of Language, History, and Language Policy. Questions such as “How does native language teaching help ELLs acquire English?” (p. 18) and “But doesn’t it help ELLs to practice speaking English as much as possible?” (p. 19) are given thorough treatment in the Pedagogy section. In the Research section, readers learn the answers to contentious and sometimes confusing questions such as “Isn’t it important to teach English early, since young children are best at language acquisition?” (p. 33) and “Why do some ELLs do well in school without bilingual education?” (p. 35). In the Legal Requirements section, readers learn for example, that although the federal government does not mandate bilingual education, certain states, including Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey, require schools to provide bilingual education programs under certain circumstances.

In the Politics of Language section, readers gain interesting insights into the role of English in other countries and in the United States through questions such as this: “English is the official language in many countries. Why should this idea be controversial in the United States?” (p. 61). The answer indicates that no country has designated English as its sole official language, but rather that nations with English as an official language are bilingual or multilingual; this policy contrasts with the monolingual situation that could arise in the United States. Undoubtedly, issues like these can invoke deep emotional responses from readers, but it is critical that they are addressed in the literature.

The one weakness of this book is also its strength: brevity. Because the book is so succinct and concise, it is hard to gain a thorough understanding of the individual issues that are presented. However, the ambitious reader can use the references and Internet resources provided to garner further knowledge. It is without question that English Learners in American Classrooms: 101 Questions, 101 Answers should be on the bookshelf of all who work with ELLs.

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Today’s Front Pages

Would you like your class to browse newspapers from around the world? Are you tired of visiting each newspaper’s Web site to find the information you need for your class? Would your students be interested in a kaleidoscopic reading of news reports? If you answered yes to at least one of these questions, then you should visit Today’s Front Pages, which is run by the Newseum.

As the name says, Today’s Front Pages provides daily access to front pages of newspapers from all over the globe. There are three ways to read them: with the use of a gallery, list, or map. In the gallery, visitors see miniature front pages in the order they appear on the site. In the list mode, newspapers are listed in alphabetical order of the places where they are published. The last option is the most fascinating one, because visitors see a map on the left-hand side of the page, with dots representing the newspapers of various locations. As they move the mouse over each dot on the map, the corresponding front page appears on the right. In any of these three possibilities, the front pages may be sorted by geographical region: USA, North America, Asia,
Caribbean, Europe, Middle East, Oceania, South America, and Africa.

In relation to the scope of the site, users have access to more than 800 front pages from 70 countries, which are updated daily. After choosing the newspaper one wants to read, the front page may be printed or opened in PDF format. In some cases, readers can be redirected to the newspaper’s site for a specific story. However, if you plan to use certain front pages for a future lesson, it is a good idea to save them on your computer the day they are released because Newseum does not provide visitors with older publications.

Additionally, this online resource offers a discretionary selection of the top 10 front pages every day. These are selected by an editor who bases the choice on story content or visual elements such as pictures or design.

This site opens up a whole range of possibilities for ESOL classroom work. For instance, students may be asked to browse through the front pages so they can learn what is going on in other countries. At the same time they are practicing their English language reading skills, they also learn about culture, geography, and history. Students can then orally report to their peers what they have learned, allowing for information exchange if they view different papers.

Learners may also practice critical reading with the help of this site. One possibility is to ask groups to read newspapers from the same region (e.g., a given country). Then they may share how different publications chose distinct stories to feature. Similarly, students may be encouraged to read what has been published about their home towns in different newspapers in order to better understand how their cities are depicted throughout the world.

In sum, Today’s Front Pages offers students and teachers an opportunity to work with original and authentic material in a meaningful way. It also saves money, because there is no need to buy all the newspapers in order to read their front pages. Finally, and most important, it saves precious time while surfing the Internet because it houses a great number of newspapers and stories all in one place.

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### Language and Interaction: An Advanced Resource Book


In English language classrooms, teachers are constantly involved with the topics highlighted in the title of this book. Language and Interaction helps readers think about how languages shape interactions, how interactions are transformed by the use of language, and how responses to these issues inform educators’ understanding of student learning.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, Foundations, presents in an accessible manner ideas about language and interaction from a variety of fields such as linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology. Tasks are provided to help readers relate these various ideas to their own lives.

The second section, Analysis, shows readers how theories can be used to analyze speech. Young presents original writings on this topic from influential linguists, philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists. Along with each writing, he includes an overview of the topic, an introduction, preview questions, reflective activities, a discussion, a summary, and further discussion of concerns raised in the readings.

The third section, Consequences, is the hands-on research part of the book. A set of data with background information, methods of data collection and analysis, and possible interpretations helps readers see how studies on language and interaction can be conducted. To lead readers further into inquiry, Young offers tasks to analyze a given set of data, suggestions on how to conduct a similar exploration, and directions for future studies. After reading this section, readers will see how languages are used to form identities in interactions, to build communities in which values and ways of using languages are shared, and to negotiate one’s way into communities.

Besides reading the book from cover to cover, readers can use it according to their interests and needs. The units in each section are organized based on various topics, and the order of topics is the same in all three sections. Although reading the book continuously is recommended, readers with an academic background can start with the theories in the second section, and experienced researchers can begin with the third section.

Overall, English language teachers who are interested in learning more about language, social interactions, and research will find Language and Interaction accessible and thought provoking. With various designed tasks, the book also invites readers to practice what it promotes: In interactions with others (including Young and the authors of readings that he presents in the book), we make sense of and even transform the world.

Hui-jung Tang is an English teacher at the Fortune Institute of Technology, in Taiwan, and a doctoral student at the University of Rochester, in the United States.

Vander Viana is a postgraduate student at the Queen’s University Belfast, in Northern Ireland.

Luciana do Amaral Teixeira is an assistant professor at Universidade Estácio de Sá, in Brazil.
In this age of technology, in which monthly Internet access often is cheaper than your phone bill and accessing a computer can be easier than finding a cab, language instruction has expanded into a technological context. Online language courses are replacing traditional classrooms, and paper textbooks are generally supplemented with CDs or even DVDs. Utilizing the capacities of the new technology, learners can interact with a global community through text or audio/video chat.

Bearing this in mind, *Interactions 2: Reading* is an innovative ESL resource, bringing old school and new school together. The book is geared toward current or prospective university students from all ages and at varying levels.

The most important feature of the book is the link to an online portal where learners and teachers can meet in a virtual classroom. The book comes with an Internet key that students can buy for an extra $5 and use to log in to the McGraw-Hill Web site and subscribe to the classroom created by their teacher. Teachers have a special key code that gives them permission to create the classroom, modify the settings, and monitor students’ pages. In this virtual context, teachers can keep track of learners’ work and progress, give instant feedback, and monitor corrections after feedback. Teachers and learners do not have to be online at the same time, so they can communicate asynchronously. Learners can track their own progress and save their work when they log out.

The book also includes an audio CD, and the entire book has corresponding online tools. On the Web site, learners can read the book on their screens, listen to audio versions of the text, watch short videos, write in the blanks provided, and save their responses.

The book consists of 10 chapters on such themes as education and student life, lifestyles around the world, languages and communication, and global connections. In addition to building basic language skills, the book promotes critical thinking skills by asking learners to identify cause-and-effect relationships, compare arguments with their own perspective, make cross-cultural comparisons, and evaluate others’ opinions. The topics are gathered from a variety of sources, including magazine articles, textbook passages, essays, and online articles. And to build learners’ test-taking skills, some chapters have a testing section similar to the format of the TOEFL IBT.

I have been using this book for several months in my intermediate-level ESL reading and writing class at a U.S. university. I have been greatly satisfied with my students’ achievement and their attitudes toward the course material and technology in general. *Interactions 2: Reading* helps build basic language skills, improves critical thinking skills, promotes academic achievement and testing skills, and increases cross-cultural awareness.

*Baburhan Uzum is an English instructor at Michigan State University, in the United States.*
An Interview With Keith Folse

Keith Folse is a TESOL faculty member in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Central Florida, in the United States. For more than 30 years, he has taught English language learners (ELLs) in the United States, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Japan, and Kuwait. He is a frequent international conference presenter and has received several teaching awards. He has also published more than 50 textbooks, most recently Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners (University of Michigan Press, 2009) and the Great Writing composition series (Heinle Cengage, 2009).

In this interview, Folse shares with Eileen Ariza, Essential Teacher’s editor, his thoughts about the role teachers play in teaching grammar.

Eileen Ariza: Some teachers have not been trained to teach grammar, lack experience learning another language, or lack exposure to linguistic variations. What do they need to know about teaching grammar?

Keith Folse: Some teachers learn about ESL grammar by taking a course on grammar or reading a book about it. However, I think most teachers learn ESL grammar through their own teaching. When I started teaching ELLs, I had had some training with ESL grammar issues, but when I had to teach a grammar course, that’s when I really had to learn about grammar. I tried to stay at least 1 day ahead of students, which meant asking more experienced colleagues to explain if clauses and gerunds to me.

English is my first language. I speak it fluently and never made mistakes such as “I no understand” or “I was born on May.” However, I had no idea what the rules were or how to explain negating verbs or at/on/in time expressions. Nonnative-English-speaking (NNES) teachers of English know about these grammar issues, but native speakers have to learn them from scratch in order to teach them.

EA: How should educators who lack a grammar background approach teaching grammar?

KF: With students, we focus on language needs, whether they be advanced composition or simple conversation. With teachers, I would give the same advice in terms of ESL grammar. What are your teaching needs? What grammar knowledge do you need? Are you teaching beginners or advanced-level ELLs? Are you teaching a composition course or a conversation class? Who are your ELLs and where are they from? Start with the book that you will be teaching from, make sure you learn the grammar in it, and be sure to stay at least 1 day ahead of students.

Mainstream teachers need to be aware of ESL grammar issues. Not knowing that mistakes such as on 1999 and the voyage that Columbus has made are a natural part of the language acquisition process can lead teachers to assess ELLs’ work harshly. Because most native-English-speaking (NES) teachers can’t explain why on and has made are incorrect here, they can’t provide instruction to improve ELLs’ English. Merely telling ELLs that their sentence is incorrect is not good teaching. Mainstream teachers need to remember that, by default, they may be the sole source of English input for their ELLs. So if the teachers don’t know how to answer ELLs’ grammar questions, the ELLs won’t receive effective teaching or error correction and their errors may become fossilized.

EA: Would NES students benefit from direct instruction of grammar as well? If so, what should teachers do to differentiate instruction for ELLs and native speakers?

KF: All students can benefit from direct instruction of grammar, but native and non-native speakers need instruction in different kinds of grammar. NES students and ELLs who have been around many native speakers may make errors such as it don’t, should have went, lay vs. lie, but ELLs need help with articles (I have cat), prepositions (in Monday), and verbs (Edison has invented).

EA: What grammar courses should teacher education and TESOL programs offer?

KF: Grammar is important in all classes, so programs need to have at least one or two grammar preparation courses for teachers to learn about traditional grammar labels (nouns, verb, etc.) and about ESL grammar issues. Teachers need to see how grammar impacts reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Many programs do not test teachers on grammar but prepare them by having them read about grammar and then write a research paper about some aspect of ESL grammar—not much help to teachers in class. MATESOL programs need to understand that reading about research and learning how to teach grammar are not at all the same thing.

EA: What are your thoughts about NNES teachers teaching English?

KF: In some ways, they have an advantage over NES teachers because, though NES teachers may be more fluent, NNES teachers are acutely aware of English grammar issues and of the specific grammar pitfalls for speakers of their native language.

EA: Any final thoughts?

KF: In learning a language, I think vocabulary is the single most important component for comprehension, but grammar is the backbone of the language. To improve their English proficiency, ELLs need to reduce errors. A paragraph that has at least one error in every sentence is not good writing, just as a conversation that has an error in every sentence does not represent good speaking. It takes time and effort with focused attention on key grammatical errors to improve. Instead of endless hours of practice with grammar worksheets, ELLs need focused practice in the skills they need the most: reading, writing, or speaking. They can benefit tremendously from having teachers who know the ins and outs of ESL grammar.

To learn more about Keith Folse and his work, visit www.keithfolse.com.

Eileen N. Whelan Ariza is a professor in the College of Education at Florida Atlantic University, in the United States, and was recently a Fulbright scholar in Puebla, Mexico.

See also “Why All K–12 Teachers Need to Know About ESL Grammar Issues,” www.tesol.org/et/.
On August 10, 2009, TESOL and Franklin Electronic Publishers cohosted the Global SpellEvent Championship in New York City, in the United States. The culmination of 18 months of planning, the event saw student participants from seven countries competing in an English spelling competition for a grand prize of US$10,000.

Originally announced at the 2009 TESOL convention in New York City, TESOL and Franklin entered into this partnership to sponsor English language spelling competitions in select countries around the world. Working together with TESOL’s affiliates, TESOL and Franklin held regional events in April and May of 2009 in the following cities:

- Ankara, Turkey (hosted by INGED)
- Beijing, China
- Buenos Aires, Argentina (hosted by Argentina TESOL)
- Mexico City, Mexico (hosted by Mexico TESOL)
- Munich, Germany
- Rome, Italy (hosted by TESOL Italy)
- Seoul, South Korea (hosted by Korea TESOL)

More than 300 students ages 15 and under participated in these events. To prepare for their local SpellEvents, teachers and students received a list of practice words that included pronunciations, definitions, word origins, and example sentences. The participating schools were also provided with participation kits that included print and electronic dictionaries provided by Franklin. Affiliate leaders coordinated the regional events, and a member of the TESOL Board of Directors and a TESOL staff member served as judges. First- and second-place winners from each regional final SpellEvent competition were awarded an all-expenses-paid trip to the United States, along with a parent or guardian, and the opportunity to win the Grand Prize US$10,000 scholarship at the Global SpellEvent Championship.

The Global SpellEvent Championship was held at the Jumeirah Essex House Hotel in New York City and was hosted by TESOL member and New York Times 2009 ESOL Teacher of the Year Tamara Kirson. Serving as judges were TESOL President-Elect Brock Brady and Treasurer Marti Edmonson. TESOL President Mark Algren and Executive Director Charles S. Amorosino, Jr. were also on hand to welcome the participants and present the prizes at the end of competition.

Prior to the start of the competition, the participants received welcome greetings from affiliate leaders Mary Beth Flynn of TESOL Italy, Ana María Rocca of Argentina TESOL, Maria Isabel Arechandieta of Mexico TESOL, and Fatma Ataman of INGED, who were all there to watch the competition. The participants, who had gotten to know one another during several earlier social events, demonstrated a true spirit of sportsmanship by cheering and encouraging each other throughout the competition. After 2 hours and 14 rounds, Clara Sofía Brunetto of Argentina was crowned the winner by correctly spelling the word bizarre. Coming in at second place was Lee Yun Yong of South Korea, at third was Carolin Lenz of Germany, and at fourth was Zhichuan Duan of China.

Plans are currently under way to expand the Global SpellEvent in 2010 to an additional 5 countries, bringing the total number of participating countries to 12. In addition to all the countries that participated this year, TESOL affiliates in France, Senegal, Chile, the United Arab Emirates, and Russia (Moscow) are all expected to host regional SpellEvent competitions in April and May of 2010.

The list of all the Global SpellEvent championship participants, along with photos from the championship and regional events, is available on TESOL’s Web site.
Jim Cummins is a professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, in Canada. During the past 20 years, his work has empowered many practicing teachers working with English language learners (ELLs), and his 1986 article “Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention,” published by Harvard Educational Review (HER), was among the 12 works selected for the HER Classics Series (2000) for their significant contribution to education.

In this interview, Elena Webb asks Cummins to reflect on his work and findings that continue to impact the fields of ESL and bilingual education.

Elena Webb: What motivated you to research issues related to ELLs?

Jim Cummins: I grew up in Ireland, so my first experience with a second language was learning Irish, one of the country’s two official languages. After studying psychology at University College Dublin, I went to Canada for graduate study in language and cognition. In the 1970s, Canada had just articulated a national policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework, and my mentor began to teach a course in that area. Working as his research assistant, I developed my own interest in bilingualism, and as a result I did my dissertation study on the effects of a French-English dual language program.

After finishing my doctorate, I went back to Ireland for 2 years, where I did some research on the effects of Irish-English bilingualism on children’s linguistic and cognitive development. My return to Alberta, Canada, coincided with an escalation of controversy about bilingualism in the United States as a result of the Lau v. Nicholas decision [which mandated that all ELLs be taught in a comprehensible manner, regardless of their native language]. At that time, I got a call from the Ford Foundation inviting me to come and provide an “outsider” perspective on the bilingual education controversy that was becoming quite volatile. That led to contact with the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, D.C., which was being funded by the Ford Foundation. Since that time, I have been very much involved in the academic debates about English language learning.

Initially, I was looking at bilingualism from a socio- and psycholinguistic point of view: What do we know about bilingual education? What are the effects of bilingualism on cognition? The research clearly showed that [Spanish-speaking] ELLs could maintain Spanish at no cost to English and could probably do better academically as a result of some instruction through Spanish. Then, as the controversy in the United States increased, it became clear to me that findings supporting bilingual education did not make any difference in terms of how the media and the politicians saw the issue. So it became very apparent how political this topic had become. The ways that power relations manifest themselves in second language classrooms and affect learning became a significant focus of my work.

Elena Webb: What do new teachers working with ELLs need to know and understand in order to succeed at engaging those students academically?

Jim Cummins: Intuitively, all of us know what kinds of things affirm us, and some of us are lucky enough to have had affirmative relationships in our homes that helped us develop confidence personally and academically. This is why I think teaching is more than just instructional strategies and curriculum; it is a matter of relationships. This is a well-known fact that is sometimes taken for granted. What new teachers may not know is that in order to engage students academically, they must understand who they are teaching and what the students are bringing into the classroom in terms of prior knowledge, experiences, and feelings. If educators don’t strive to find out about those elements, then teaching becomes “one size fits all,” in which case some students will learn the concepts and others won’t.

Curriculum is typically developed with a “generic” student in mind, and this generic student is usually from a middle-class, monolingual, and monocultural background. To make this curriculum work for the diverse students in your class, you need to get connected to them and find out what they know and what they don’t know. The idea that engaging prior knowledge is a fundamental part of the learning process stems from extensive research in cognitive psychology. Fortunately, this is not a difficult concept to grasp. It implies that all new teachers should aspire to learn as much about their students’ backgrounds as possible. Again, teaching is not just a matter of technique; it is a matter of human connection. If students feel that the teacher cares about them, likes them, is interested in them, they are going to engage much more.

(continued on page 60)
An Interview With Jim Cummins  (continued from page 59)

EW: Having identified the need to tap into students’ prior knowledge and connect with their diverse identities, what qualities do you deem essential for all educators to possess in order to do that successfully?

JC: First of all, they need to be committed to teaching in the sense of advancing students’ potential as human beings. Second, it is critical for them to understand that teaching is not just a matter of transmission. After all, you can have a robot transmit information. Teaching is a matter of connecting with students, establishing relationships with them, and thinking about what the students are going to get out of the 9 or 10 months that they will spend in your classroom. So in addition to providing ELLs with access to essential content and getting them on the trajectory of catching up in terms of academic language, teachers need to affirm students’ sense of self and help them realize that with support they can succeed at school just like everybody else.

The early stage of learning English can be an extremely frustrating period of time for newcomer students: They can’t express their intelligence, their sense of humor, or their personality through English. So unless the teacher is looking for ways in which students can realize their talents and abilities—their multilingual as well as more general talents—these children are likely to feel diminished as human beings. In other words, teachers who show empathy and recognize students’ potential are likely to succeed better in promoting ELLs’ academic development. There has to be a desire to connect with learners and establish positive relationships with them. It is obviously important to be able to implement effective teaching strategies and techniques, but at least as important is the human dimension in terms of creating meaningful, affirmative relationships with ELLs.

To learn more about Jim Cummins’s work and research projects, visit www.iese.utoronto.ca/MLC/cummins.htm.

Elena Webb teaches fourth grade in a diverse school in Florida, in the United States, and is pursuing a doctorate in curriculum leadership at Florida Atlantic University.

TESOL Publications Update

TESOL, like many associations, is aware of the need to provide members with timely, appropriate, and cost-effective benefits. To that end, the TESOL Board of Directors has approved revamping TESOL’s current publications lineup to better serve its membership.

If you do not have an e-mail address on file with TESOL, you may want to add it to your record so you don’t miss any of the following changes and member improvements. To add an e-mail address, log in to www.tesol.org, click on Edit Profile, add the e-mail address, and save the changes.

This is your final issue of Essential Teacher. A full archive of Essential Teacher articles is available online to all members as a resource at www.tesol.org/et/archives.

TESOL Connections (TC) will take on new content as well as a new look, and beginning in November 2009 it will be e-mailed monthly to all members. In addition to providing critical communications from and about the association, TC will expand its features to include resources from TESOL interest section newsletters, the popular column Grammatically Speaking, job listings, author interviews for new books, TESOL Stories, and more.

In March 2010, TESOL Journal (TJ) will launch in a new online-only format as a member benefit, free for all members. TJ is a peer-reviewed online journal with robust interactive elements. The format enables an enriching way to experience issues facing the profession. To read the full interview on how the new TJ editor, Dr. Margo DelliCarpini, envisions the publication, go to www.tesol.org/DelliCarpini.

These publications are designed to keep all TESOL members informed about their association and up to date with what is happening in the field.
TESOL Lobbies Capitol Hill for Adult ESL

On June 24, 2009, 22 TESOL members representing 18 U.S.-based affiliates met in Washington, D.C., to lobby for adult ESL on TESOL Advocacy Day 2009. Featuring issue briefings and a workshop, the event was capped by visits to the U.S. Congress. By the end of the day, TESOL members had visited the offices of more than 70 representatives and senators.

Responding to recent Congressional action, TESOL Advocacy Day focused on adult ESL and the efforts to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA). The primary federal funding vehicle for adult ESL in the United States, WIA is several years overdue for legislative renewal, or reauthorization. Both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives have held hearings on this legislation in recent months, giving the indication that Congress may move forward on reauthorization this year.

The goals of TESOL Advocacy Day were not only to lobby on key issues for TESOL, but also to provide an interactive learning experience for affiliate representatives on elements of advocacy. To maximize the impact of TESOL Advocacy Day, key members of Congress serving on the education and appropriations committees in the Senate and House of Representatives were targeted for meetings. Each TESOL affiliate representative was required to complete several tasks in advance of the day, such as setting up individual meetings with its Congressional representatives. To assist with this, the TESOL Central Office provided directions and guidance

Following a successful meeting during TESOL Advocacy Day 2009, Rep. Jared Polis (D-CO) arranged a visit to an ESL program in Boulder, CO. Pictured from left to right are Colorado TESOL Board members Tamara Milbourn, Liz Henry, and Erin Kimmel, Rep. Jared Polis, and Colorado TESOL President Bruce Rogers.

Responding to recent Congressional staff input, TESOL Advocacy Day 2009 was a mix of veteran advocates and people brand new to advocacy. Overall, all of the participants agreed that this event was a positive experience for them and for TESOL. “TESOL Advocacy Day was so cool!” exclaimed Lisa Ireland of California TESOL. “To say that I really enjoyed the experience is an understatement. It was terrific to have the experience of meeting my representatives and see firsthand what a difference I can make. Participating was a life-changing experience in that it reaffirmed my desire to advocate, to continue to contact my representatives, and to remain politically involved.”

Additional information, photographs, and a list of all the participants are available on the TESOL Web site at www.tesol.org. If you are interested in learning more about your Congressional representatives and the legislative issues TESOL is tracking, go to the TESOL U.S. Advocacy Action Center at http://capwiz.com/tesol.
Executive Committee Approves Position Statements on Deaf Learners, Certificate Programs

At its recent meeting, the TESOL Executive Committee approved two new position statements on deaf learners and independent short-term TESL/TEFL certificate programs. Both position statements are available for download on the TESOL Web site.
TESOL Virtual Seminars

Access the live or playback versions of these TESOL virtual seminars:

October 1: “Improving English-Medium Instruction on EFL University Campuses, From the Bottom-Up and Top-Down,” with Kara MacDonald and Joyce Kling

October 29: “Literature-Based Instruction With ELLs,” with Nancy Hadaway

November 5: “Guidelines for the Effective Use of Web Applications: Focus on the Learner,” with Tom Robb

December 4: “Closing the Achievement Gap for Limited Formal Schooling and Long-Term English Language Learners,” with David and Yvonne Freeman

Learn more at www.tesol.org/virtualeseminars.

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TESOL Nomination Awards:
- TESOL Virginia French Allen Award for Scholarship and Service
- D. Scott Emright TESOL Interest Section Service Award
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- TESOL Award for Excellence in Teaching

Application and Nomination Deadline: November 1, 2009
TESOL membership is a requirement for most awards.

For detailed information about applying for TESOL’s awards and grants, visit the TESOL Web site at http://www.tesol.org/awards
Inquiries: awards@tesol.org, or 703-518-2532

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The TESOL Core Certificate Program is a 130-hour online training program developed by Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL), the leading global education association for the English language teaching (ELT) field. The certificate program provides a foundation in the theory and practice of English language teaching: It offers necessary training for those who wish to enter the ELT field and it supports individuals in enhancing their professional practice and their careers serving the needs of English language learners around the world.

The program provides a summary of the core knowledge of the field, and is designed for current or prospective teachers and administrators worldwide with limited formal training in ELT. It focuses on teaching adults in ESL and EFL environments and young learners in EFL environments. The certificate program includes two online courses as well as a professional development component.

For more information, please visit www.tesol.org/corecertificate or contact corecertificate@tesol.org.

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