MARYLAND
TESOL NEWS
MARYLAND TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

www.marylandtesol.org

Facilitating Language Acquisition: ESL Educators as Literacy Practitioners

By Luis Javier Pentón Herrera, M.Ed., M.S., M.Ed.

Literacy practitioners are "educators at all levels, PK-16: regular classroom teachers, ESL and bilingual teachers, anyone who teaches reading and writing, special educators, tutors, coaches, speech pathologists, and all who teach any form of the communicative arts" (Cobb & Kallus, 2011, p. 231). Being a literacy practitioner entails more than teaching to the test; it requires educators to become active seekers of knowledge to provide learners with deep foundations and understanding of the lesson's objectives at hand. Every teacher is a literacy practitioner and, as such, an ambassador of proper

Constructing Connections With Newcomer Centers
By Andrea Koller

Sara landed in my middle school newcomer ESOL class last October , cheerful but road weary, and a little dazed. She brought her kitten-covered notebook and mechanical pencil, ready for her new academic life in the U.S.A. A week later, during our Halloween party, her disdain for goldfish crackers was revealed as she explained she'd eaten more of them at the detention center than a person should eat in a lifetime. Slowly her story trickled out: she'd somehow made her way from el Salvador to Baltimore, walking to *la frontera*, boarding a bus somewhere in Texas. Eventually, Sara was detained in Georgia at a facility that served a steady diet of apple juice and goldfish crackers. Her father soon scraped together enough money to bus her the rest of the way to Baltimore, and just days after her arrival she sat in my classroom, happy to remember the word for "apple" on the picture card.

Was her 50 minutes a day in an eighth-grade ESOL class enough to prepare her for high school? Would it help her succeed in content classes throughout the rest of the school day? Unlikely; I could only support her basic language development while she struggled in her core subjects. Like many older newcomers, Sara arrived with not only English language needs; she showed serious deficits in math and science background as well. Sara's a hard worker and motivated learner but is

frustrated at her slow progress in her American high school. Would she have been better served at a newcomer academy, a kind of ramp-up program geared toward more mature students?

Newcomer academies for ELLs sound like a perfect solution for new arrivals like Sara. According to research conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics, school-district-created newcomer programs began to be established during the 1970s. Created as a stepping-stone prior to enrolling in a traditional US school, newcomer programs were initially designed as separate schools with service to ELLs as their sole focus. In these schools students are enrolled for a limited time period of not more than two years. This type of program helps level the field for new arrivals, assisting students of different nationalities and educational histories in acclimating to their new environment in terms of language development and social/academic

Contents:

A Message from Your MDTESOL Newsletter Editors

by Chester Gates and Billie Muńoz, Editors

Maryland TESOL has had another successful conference, and Maryland prepares for the world to descend on Baltimore for next year's TESOL International Convention and English Language Expo. April will be here soon and Maryland will be well-represented at this year's event. We would love to hear from presenters about their colloquia, discussion groups, roundtable discussions, poster sessions, practice or research-oriented presentations, teaching tips, and workshops. Send us (newsletter@mdtesol.org) your presentation's title, session description, and the date and time by March 18, 2016, and we will publish it in a special section of our Spring newsletter.

On a sadder note, the recent violence in Mali, Iraq, Lebanon, Bangladesh, Nigeria, and France has provoked an American response. Some changed their Facebook pages to the Tricolore. Some asked how such a thing could happen in France. Some decided that Islam, and especially Syrian Islam, was to blame and that the best response was to keep refugees fleeing Syria from finding asylum here. Many forgot or ignored Mali, Iraq, Lebanon, Bangladesh, and Nigeria. Perhaps we have come to expect violence "there."

We teach human beings from around the world and we may find it difficult to answer questions about xenophobia and Islamophobia in the United States. Fortunately, we do not have to cope with this alone. We have a number of resources available to us:

- TESOL: TESOL's blog for November 16, Can We Really "Teach Peace"? by Kristen Lindahl, provides some insights into and resources for tackling this difficult topic in the classroom. (http://blog.tesol.org/can-we-really-teach-peace/)
- The New York Times: The Learning Network for November 16 provides a lesson plan for discussing the refugee crisis in the ESOL classroom. (http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/11/16/e-l-l-practice-the-global-refugee-crisis/?emc=edit_tnt_20151116&nlid=61290461&tntemail0=y&_r=1)
- The International Rescue Committee: The IRC has a number of resources available on their website that students can use to dispel myths about refugees. There is also a page from the Baltimore and Silver Spring offices of the IRC with local news. (http://www.rescue.org/)
- UNHCR: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees provides information and statistics about refugees for the past sixty-five years. Advanced students can use the site to find commonalities between today's refugees and those from years past. (http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home)

MARYLAND TESOL BOARD

2014   **2015**

PRESIDENT
Yeji Yoon

PAST PRESIDENT
Debra Suarez

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT
Karen Blinder

SECOND VICE PRESIDENT
Sherry Lyons

TREASURER
Rahila Siddiqui

SECRETARY
Diana Siemer

MEMBERSHIP
Doaa Rashed

NEWSLETTER
Chester Gates
Billie Muñoz

ADVOCACY
Myles Hoenig
Tanya Camp

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION
Tara Theroux
Ellen Clark

SECONDARY EDUCATION
Ashley Jenoff
Luis Pentón Herrera

HIGHER EDUCATION
Alex Garrido
Michael Huckaby

ADULT EDUCATION
Diane Dunlap
Dave Cecil

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION
Andrea Koller
Rosie Verratti

TEACHER EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
Ilhye Yoon
vacant

WEBSITE COORDINATOR
Charles Shimonkevitz

GRADUATE STUDIES
Owen Andrews
Tabitha Kidwell

CONTACT THE BOARD AT
website@mdtesol.org

Newsletter design by NeuroFury

A Message from Your MDTESOL President

by Yeji Yoon

Welcome to the Maryland TESOL Newsletter!

I hope your semester is smooth sailing! This is a good time of the year to reflect upon and celebrate past successes and to recoup for new challenges and opportunities.

I'd like to share some of Maryland TESOL's achievements and exciting news.

On Saturday, October 17th, Maryland TESOL had its 35th Annual Fall Conference at Washington College. Our conference theme was Beyond Borders: Connecting Diverse Perspectives and we were very excited to have Eli Hinkel, Ph.D., as our keynote speaker. Her keynote address was "Connecting Diverse Perspectives in Teaching Writing" which is a topic right up her alley.

Some may have wondered why Maryland TESOL decided to go across the bridge for this year's conference, but it was mainly in line with the spirit of this year's conference theme, Beyond Borders: Connecting Diverse Perspectives. On average, Maryland TESOL has attendees from approximately 9 counties out of the 24 counties and county-equivalents in Maryland. This year we had representation from 16 counties. I would say this is definitely an achievement. Our goal is to serve the professional community in Maryland and this was an opportunity to have our members on the Eastern Shore share their stories.

As we all know, the 2016 TESOL International Convention & English Language Expo is held in Baltimore. To top that off, TESOL is celebrating its 50th anniversary. In hopes of getting our attendees into the TESOL spirit, we had limited edition promotional items on sale for our attendees to take home as souvenirs and a photo booth that was on popular demand as well. (For more pictures, you can check out our Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/mdtesol. That reminds me, we are now on Twitter as well. So, tweet us! # us @mdtesol!)

Maryland TESOL is always looking for opportunities to improve and benefit its membership. This year, in particular, we'll be looking for ways to get our membership involved with volunteering at the TESOL International Convention. (To receive information on volunteering opportunities, please click here.)

I wish to bring you more exciting news as we prepare ourselves in welcoming the 2016 TESOL International Convention and English Language Expo in Baltimore! Please do not hesitate to reach out to us with suggestions. We are here to serve you!

Best,

Yeji Yoon
President, Maryland TESOL
president@mdtesol.org

Are You Receiving emails from MD TESOL?

Have you been receiving emails from MDTESOL? If not, you may need to add website@mdtesol.org to your list of "safe senders" in your email account. That way you can stay informed about all the exciting Interest Section events, advocacy issues, and conferences that MDTESOL offers throughout the year.

TESOL 2016 International Convention & English Language Expo

5–8 APRIL 2016 • BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, USA

JOIN TESOL IN BALTIMORE

5–8 APRIL 2016 TUESDAY–FRIDAY

REGISTRATION OPENS IN SEPTEMBER

tesol international association

REGISTRATION & RATES | EXHIBIT, SPONSOR, ADVERTISE | NOT A MEMBER? JOIN TESOL TODAY

Invited Speakers

Job MarketPlace

All About Baltimore

English Language Expo

Highlights From TESOL 2015

2016 Call for Participation

My Second Summer in Siberia: Teaching and Learning

By Esther Robbins, Prince Georges Community College

For a month this past summer, I lived in Koltsovo, Siberia [close to Novosibirks]. As I did last summer, I traveled the nearly 6,000 miles around the globe to be part of the Mini American Summer School (in its 15th year) teaching English to Russian middle and high school students. Last year, I brought my son along, and this past summer I traveled with my daughter (who had the benefit of experience, having taught in English in both Hungary and Slovakia last summer).

Once again, it was a **hot** summer in Siberia! Indeed, while the winter months bring sub-zero temperatures to Koltsovo, the summers are surprisingly hot. Not only were the temperatures in the 90s, but as these hot months are such a small percentage of the year, summer-life is lived without A/C and with minivans whose windows, for the most part, do not open as well as with Babushkas (grandmothers) all around who firmly believe that a breeze (even in these hot months!) will make you sick; moreover, if you are in wet clothing (i.e. after a swim or a trip to the banya—sauna) it is believed that that will also make you sick ("Even on a 90+ degree day", I asked as I was urged-yet again- to put on dry clothing!)

More challenging than the heat (really not a big problem as the evenings brought cooler temperatures and one acclimates quickly) this summer was the fact that there had been a great deal of rain before we arrived. That meant that the insect population was booming. Initially, I had thought that the "*kamar*" ("mosquitos"—now you know a Russian word!) would be the issue, and while they were there and they were BIG, and they DID bite, really the problem was the "*moshka*" ("gnats"—now you know a *SECOND* Russian word!). These little buggers were our nemeses! We literally had clouds of them around us wherever we walked, and we were living an on-foot life in Koltsovo— worst of all, *moshka* BITE! In fact, I think that they bit the American teachers preferentially over the locals. It is my theory that they liked to sample foreign food (us!). In time, we learned to do what the locals did which was to anoint ourselves with vanilla oil before going out. At first we were buying packets of powdered vanilla (not sold as the extract with which we are familiar in the US, but sold as a powder in small envelopes) and mixing them with water, but eventually we found the bottles of oil for sale.

OK—that was my *only* big complaint! Everything else was a delight! Our Russian colleagues were welcoming and a pleasure to work with, and I've got to say that having the school cafeteria serve us a snack (usually hot porridge and tea) for morning break as well as a nutritious lunch daily sure felt like a luxury! Finally, of course, the students (our real reason for being there) were the main attraction. My daughter taught the wee ones, and—with my PGCC experience—I taught the older students.
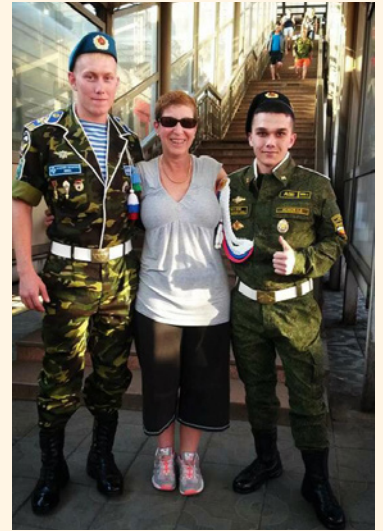
This year, I surveyed my three upper classes to gain some insights into their world perspectives. The questions I posed to them were as follows:

#1] If you had the magic power to change ONE thing about the world, what would you change?

#2] What do you imagine your 'dream job' would be?

#3] If you could visit ONE place in the U.S.A., where would you visit?

#4] What would you like to tell all Americans about Russia (that you think they do not know)?

#5] How do you think YOUR generation will change the world?

In response **to #1]** *If you had the magic power to change ONE thing about the world, what would you change?* The most popular answer, by far, was "eliminate war and starvation." The second most popular answer was "kill all mosquitos." I was heartened to see that a peace-loving attitude was the number one answer, for how else will we proceed toward a peaceful world? The desire to kill all mosquitos is one that I certainly could relate to (you *DID* see my earlier paragraph all about *that* problem! ☺) After these two top answers, there was a great deal of variety in responses from 'make all airfares free' to 'make it summer all year long' demonstrating the uniqueness of so many individuals' imaginations.

Question **#2]** *What do you imagine your 'dream job' would be?* Resulted in the following top five dream jobs: doctor, professional video gamer, artist, translator, and some undefined job in which a person would get paid to travel. After these top five, other dream jobs ran the gamut from "president's pilot" to "psychotherapist" to "YouTuber."

Question **#3]** *If you could visit ONE place in the U.S.A., where would you visit?* revealed that New York (the grand slam winner) is our most famous American city (in Koltsovo, Siberia, at least!) with the next runners up being Yellow Stone National Park, Los Angeles, Niagara Falls, California, the Grand Canyon, and Miami.

Question **#4]** *What would you like to tell all Americans about Russia (that you think they do not know)?* was the most interesting question to me. The number one answer, by an overwhelming percentage, was that they wanted to tell Americans that "there are no bears walking the streets or in our homes in Siberia." The number two and three answers were that "not all Russians drink vodka and play the balalaika" and that "Russians are not angry or aggressive, but are good, friendly people who love peace and don't want war." My students were deeply concerned with what they believe to be the false opinion held by Americans re the Russian people. The want us to know that they do not live in a bear-infested, uncivilized place and that they are as interested in peace as we are. I am more than happy to deliver this message to you. There is hope in the world, right?

The last question, **#5** *How do you think YOUR generation will change the world?* elicited a top answer that is little surprise to anyone who has the pleasure of living with or working with the younger generation nowadays. The young generation will change the world with "technology" it will be a "high tech, digital century."

Finally, just so you know, there were lots of other fun moments outside of the classroom on this trip including swimming in Lake Baikal -- the world's deepest, oldest [25 million years old!] and largest freshwater lake (by volume)--, traveling on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, touring Moscow as well as Irkutsk, and even getting to hold an arctic fox! Does it all sound great?

It sure was! If you are interested in being part of the future Mini American Summer School faculty, pop me an email (erobbins@pgcc.edu). ∎

What Works: Listening for Words

By Adreon Hubbard, Baltimore City Public Schools ESOL teacher and Former MDTESOL Elementary Ed IS CoChair

I developed a simple activity that can be used with all ages, English proficiency levels, and content areas to develop vocabulary, listening, and reading skills. I call it *Listening for Words*.

1. Select a set of words from a text or video.
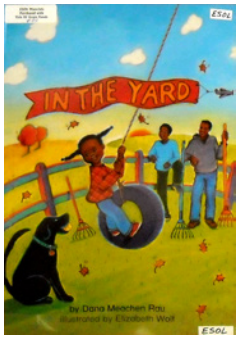
First, take a high-interest text or video clip and select ten to twenty words from it. You could pick verbs, nouns, adjectives, rhyming words, sight words, or a combination of these, depending on your lesson or unit focus. For example, I did a series of lessons with first graders using the Big Book *In The Yard* where I focused on action verbs like *grows, waters, rakes*, and *mows* (see photo).

2. Make the word cards and handout.

Write the words with a thick marker on brightly colored 3 x 5 index cards. Make a list of the same words on a poster in the classroom. Make a handout of the words to distribute to students. Multiple encounters with the same words in multiple formats helps students remember them. I use the handout as a quiz later in the unit.

3. Display the words.

Display the words on a pocket chart, poster, or projector. If you have a small group, lay them out on the table. Have students volunteer to read them as they are able. Model saying the words correctly as needed, or have more advanced students do so. At this time, you can check for comprehension of the words or wait to do that later, since the words will make more sense to them after they have heard the story or informational text. I usually provide a basic explanation of any words students do not know the meaning of, perhaps adding a gesture, picture, or example to aid comprehension. I also briefly mention digraphs, vowel teams, silent e, and any other phonics rules they may need practice with as we read the words.

4. Have students choose their words.

Have students select a word or words by asking, "May I have *grows*?" For weaker readers, you could say a word and have them find the word, or use word cards with pictures. To add movement to the class, you can have students come up to the pocket chart to pick their word card and take it back to their desk. Students should keep their word cards face up and flat on their desks or table in front of them. Although younger students sometimes fidget and

play with the cards, the cards add a valuable kinesthetic/tactile element to the lesson. In subsequent lessons, students will often say "That's my word!" and show a sense of ownership of the word that helps them remember it. One time all of my first graders wanted the word "hospital," so I had to keep it for myself. It was nice to see them so interested in a word!

5. Do the activity.

Explain to students that they will listen for their words when they hear the story or video and should hold them up when they hear the words. Read aloud the text or play the audio cd or digital recording or video. Some students may need prompting such as, "Who has *grows*?" Students will usually notice when another student's word was heard and they did not hold it up, and the students will often prompt each other. In Baltimore City, part of our Instructional Framework rubric is that students hold one another accountable, so this might earn you some points on a lesson observation. Students stay engaged even when their word has been said, because they are listening for the other students' words. If you have a student who tends to glaze over, give them a word that is said repeatedly in the story.

6. Do it again in different ways.

You can do the activity again with the same text and words and have students select different words. When the video version of a story is available online, I do the Listening for Words activity with the video as well. Baltimore City teachers have free access to video streaming at discoveryeducation.com. Videos I have found of books featured in the old Reading Rainbow show with LeVar Burton include *Stellaluna, The Adventures of Taxi Dog,* and *Where the Wild Things Are*. Others may be available on youtube. Yet another variation of Listening for Words is using phrases or sentences from the text rather than individual words.
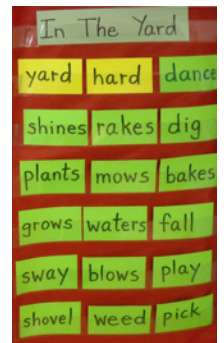
7. Save your word cards

I take a ziplock bag, label it with the title of the text, and store the word cards in there. Planning for multiple grade and proficiency levels is time-consuming: do yourself a favor and take the time to save and store your materials for easy retrieval in the future.

Listening for Words is simple and easy to implement, yet it consistently engages students, gets them to remember key words, and helps them enjoy class. I hope this is an activity you will try! ∎

What Works: Supporting Mainstream Teachers with English Language Learners

By Tema Encarnacion, ESOL Teacher, Glen Burnie High School, Anne Arundel Public Schools and Erin C. Sullivan, ESOL Educational Associate, Baltimore City Public Schools

As the fastest growing student demographic in the United States, English language learners (ELLs) are entering our schools in unprecedented numbers (Calderon, Slavin & Sanchez, 2011). Due to this rapid influx, our teachers and schools often struggle in how to best support these students, especially given their varied cultures, languages and academic backgrounds (Bunch, Kibler & Pimental, 2013). ELLs face obstacles in accessing academic rigor in their content classes as most mainstream teachers have no, or at best minimal, training in how to best support their many complex needs (Berg, Petron & Greybeck, 2012). Likely, due to limited training in working with ELLs in teacher preparation programs, mainstream teachers express a lack of efficacy in working with this group of students (Calderon et al., 2011). Research on linguistically responsive teaching highlight the need for mainstream teachers to support ELLs' native language and to build on their background knowledge to make content more accessible (Lucas & Villegas, 2012). Leveraging students' native language and background knowledge is particularly important for ELLs who arrive in the United States as secondary students because they often have more advanced native language skills and academic experiences from on which teachers could potentially build. As ESOL teachers, you can support mainstream teachers as they work with ELLs by helping them to incorporate students' native language and background knowledge into instruction. Consider some of the following as you support your content area teachers.

1. Share information about students' native language proficiency and academic background. Mainstream teachers may know what their students' native languages are, but they often do not know whether a student has strong literacy skills in their native language. They are also often unaware of their students' previous academic experience. Consider sharing information you have gathered through pre-assessments, the intake process and through your prior experiences working with particular students

2. Encourage teachers to point out cognates to their students. Even when words are extremely similar between students' native languages and English, students sometimes fail to make the connection. Both bilingual and monolingual teachers can guide students to identify cognates which may be common in their content. In fact, cognates represent a considerable number of English vocabulary encountered by Romance language speakers. Refer mainstream teachers to www. cognates.org. Also encourage teachers to use synonyms for Tier 2 vocabulary, high-frequency cross-content vocabulary, as this may uncover cognates between English and the students' native language that may not have been otherwise apparent.

3. When appropriate, provide content resources in the students' native languages. Many textbooks have Spanish versions. Additionally, the internet allows students to access a wealth of resources in their native language. Teachers should encourage students to use the internet to search for appropriate native language supports, instead of simply relying on Google Translate which may muddle the content rather than clarify it.

4. Encourage mainstream teachers to build on students' cultural backgrounds, experiences as immigrants and language learners to make meaningful connections with the content. For example, a lesson on the waves of immigration in the 20th century could easily be tied with the waves of immigration in the 21st century. Sometimes teachers are hesitant to make these connections as a way of helping students garner meaning.

5. Support ELLs working together and conferring in their native language. While teachers may not be able to understand what their students are saying, teachers can provide ELLs with structures that allow them to discuss concepts in their native languages and then record their learning in English for the teacher to assess. By allowing students to discuss a topic in their native language, the teacher can ensure a depth of discussion that may not otherwise be possible for students at lower levels of English proficiency. Students can access grade level content through native language discussions and then work together to demonstrate their understanding in English.

Teachers often struggle to support students' native language and often see it as a deficit, rather than as a building block for more in-depth earning. Often teachers think that because they, themselves, are not bilingual or because they do not speak their students' languages, that they cannot support their students' learning. The suggestions outlined in this article do not require extensive knowledge of a student's native language in order to support students in accessing grade level content. They do require a willingness to embrace students' prior experiences as a vehicle for further learning and to make connections across languages.

Self Esteem and the Adult ESOL Learner

By David Cecil

If you live in the United States of America, you live in a country that is made up of immigrants. Historians pretty much agree the first Americans came to us from Siberia about 15,000 years ago. They brought their language and their culture with them, and so began the great American melting pot experiment.

Today, they continue to come from all corners of the world. They bring many languages, many cultures, and they all have something in common. They seek freedom, opportunity, and the American dream. As the foreign-born population continues to grow, so does the need to provide English language learning opportunities.

While it is very difficult to find agreement on the number of adults taking ESL courses (both publicly and privately funded), there is a general consensus that the number is upward of five to seven million. Low self-esteem is widespread in the population due to their cultural and ethnic identification. (1)

Building Self-Esteem

Here are some ideas for building self-esteem that are universally accepted and yet often overlooked, especially with adult learners.

- Setting realistic, measurable, and attainable goals.

- Having students write a short paragraph about a typical day in their lives (not for beginners) is a good way to engage them, yet not too difficult to complete.

- For beginners, answering several single, goal-oriented questions can give the student a sense of accomplishment.

High self-esteem leads to persistence in the face of a setback or failure. This is especially noteworthy in our ESL population. High self-esteem in the general population doesn't always translate into high performance. (2) I would submit that in the adult ESL population, improved self-esteem has a much greater impact on performance.

Measuring Self-Esteem

Measuring self-esteem is not easy. It is difficult because it's hard to touch and hard to count. Difficult but not impossible.

In the context of this article, there are two ways to measure self-esteem. One is volunteer rates of individuals and the other is volunteer rates of a class.

Each time a student raises his or her hand to answer a question, put a tic mark next to their name for each class.

VOLUNTEER RATES OF INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS PER CLASS

Week	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Student A	3	4	3	3	4	5	5	4	6	7
Student B	1	1	2	1	2	3	3	4	4	5
Student C	0	0	0	1	2	1	2	3	5	5
Student D	3	4	3	5	5	6	7	7	6	7
Student E	2	1	2	2	4	3	4	5	6	6
Total	9	10	10	12	17	18	21	23	27	30
Average	1.8	2	2	2.4	3.4	3.6	4.2	4.6	5.4	6

There are three elements that impact self-esteem in the classroom – the student's background, the teacher, and the materials used in the classroom.

Student

If the student's background was nurturing and encouraging with success after success, then the student has built in self-esteem and will probably excel on their own.

Teacher

If the teacher is high energy, animated, enthusiastic, encouraging, and positive with the students, he or she will build self-esteem.

Materials

The materials used are the only variable most likely under our control. If the teacher introduces a new learning tool or teaching method, that is the ideal point to look for a change in the individual volunteer rate.

Conclusion

Self-esteem is elusive but at the same time a very important component of student success, especially in the case of adult ESL learners. As the number of adult ESL learners continues to climb, so will the demand for caring and fully engaged teachers. While our future is uncertain, one thing is crystal clear. More diversity and changing demographics will play a bigger role in ESL education.

(1) Ethnic identification, Self Esteem and immigrant psychological health – Drew Nesdale & Anita Mak 2003

(2) Rosenberg Self Esteem scale 1965 Society and the adolesent self image – Princeton University Press ■

Berg, H., Petron, M., & Greybeck, B. (2012). Setting the foundation for working with English language learners in the secondary classroom. *American Secondary Education, 40*(3), 34-44.

Bunch, G., Kimmler, A., Pimentel, S. (2013, May). *Realizing opportunities for English learners in the common core English language arts and disciplinary literacy standards.* Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Conference: San Francisco, CA.

Calderon, M., Slavin, R., & Sanchez, M. (2011). Effective instruction for English learners. *The Future of Children, 21(1),* 103-127.

Lucas, T., & Villegas, A. M. (2012). The missing piece in teacher education: The preparation of linguistically responsive teachers. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Teachers College, Columbia University),* (2), 297-318. ■

What Works: Letting Your Learners Explore Language Naturally

By Chris McKinnon

What works in a classroom is letting your learners explore language naturally. Unless there is an explicit reason for limiting their access to learning, limitations should be carefully considered. This is not to say remove all boundaries and let anything go in your classes; instead of jumping from one extreme to the opposite extreme, experiment with less controlled environments. Encourage your learners to freely explore language in ways that are conducive to their learning styles. And above all, ask yourself - why. Why are the limitations I use in my classroom needed.

Last year I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to conduct some research in the field of TESOL to discover whether limitations were actually effective. I began by noting where learners were struggling. I found that it was not with the linguistic elements of syntax, lexis, and pragmatics, but simply with a task that was restricting their natural curiosity. I quickly discovered when we confine our classrooms to tasks such as - use the ten words from this unit to discuss the topic - learners struggle with production. This had less to do with their knowledge of the target language, and more to do with the artificial nature of the task. Language is extremely flexible and allows us to express a myriad of emotions and ideas. I found when I removed the limitation of only these ten words and the unit's topic that my learners would write through their break. They wanted to express themselves, just in a way that I had not controlled. I reassessed my goals in this class. I had to ask myself why. Was the goal to have the class write about the topic, or was the goal to have them master control over the target language? For this class, an intermediate group eight Saudi learners, the goal was to acquire and control a wide range of lexical items for use in academic writing. The goal was, in fact, the opposite of what I had been reinforcing. I wonder how this article would look were I given ten buzzwords that I had been forced to include.

This same class was also required to begin learning how to produce paragraphs in English - topic sentences, support, and conclusions. Though, I was slightly frustrated with the content they had produced. The paragraphs they wrote were all very similar - eight to ten simple sentences, basic topics, basic support. Then I actually noticed what I had been asking them to do. The assignment clearly stated "Write a paragraph about x". Much like I do with my professors, my learners were following my instructions. When my professors ask me to write a two-page paper - I will do some creative editing to ensure I have exactly two pages. My learners were doing the same thing. One week later, learners in this same class had produced three well written and sophisticated paragraphs. I had simply removed one line from the instructions - "Write a paragraph about x". Naturally, the class had asked how long it had to be. To this I replied as long as it needs to be. The trick was giving them an assignment that they enjoyed writing about. This way they would continue writing until they had exhausted their topic, rather than only writing the base essentials. I asked myself before I wrote this article, how would this look if I only had one paragraph to work with?

In a similar fashion, I had a professor insist that I stop writing during his lectures; he wanted me just to listen to him rather than take notes. Personally, as a kinesthetic/visual learner, I need to write everything down. In fact, my weakest link is the audio channel. The professor, in trying to help, actually reduced my ability to learn. He had controlled my learning style rather than facilitated an environment where I was free to use his input as I felt I needed. As TESOL instructors, many of us are guilty of similar types of restrictions. Ask yourself how often you place limitations in your classes with expressions such as English only, no cell phones, only use 'x' target language. Certainly there is a time and a place for such limitations; however, outside of assessments, should instructors be in charge of dictating how best students should learn? Should we not rather allow this generation the freedom to use the tools that we never had access to twenty years ago? Perhaps this is a case of teaching as we were taught. Time to ask yourself - why. ■

behaviors. Content classes are introduced and ELLs are presented with grade-appropriate topics in an ESOL setting. After experiencing healthy growth throughout the 1990s, many of these stand-alone academies unfortunately fell victim to the constraints of No Child Left Behind mandates. According to CAL's Deborah Short, "Whole-school programs would never reach proficiency under NCLB" due to accountability pressures, and such programs were dismantled or absorbed in abbreviated form into traditional schools in the district.

School districts across the country are looking closely at newcomer ELL services. What do successful newcomer programs look like? Thinking broadly, they should provide safe educational environments that create a bridge between formal learning and the student's new society. Program flexibility allows teachers to respond quickly and fluidly to the range of individual student needs, and also to adapt to the possible transiency of the student population. Beyond basic skill building, an ideal newcomer program would provide content learning that allows students to progress at the pace that suits them, thereby allowing them to transition into traditional schools settings when appropriate. Bilingual teachers and staff in a newcomer setting would be a welcome asset as families search for guidance in their new situation. Recently the US has seen an influx of unaccompanied, adolescent newcomers, and while their parents may be somewhat acclimated to their nonnative culture, their children bring with them a new set of needs to be addressed. Families need to be connected to social service outlets and community groups and full-service newcomer centers can help them navigate this new territory. Also, the US public school system can be an intimidating world with unfamiliar rules, language, and protocols, and often immigrant parents are reluctant to engage in their child's educational experience. Newcomer centers should provide a comfortable opportunity to ease families into their new academic setting, creating a connection between family, student, and school. Extended opportunity for instruction and support should be available after school and during summer, thereby helping to prevent learning "slides" while continually promoting language and academic development.

Adolescent newcomers present a variety of issues that reach beyond homework help and math facts. Educational researcher, Monica Friedlander, refers to newcomer programs as "cultural shock absorbers" because they help ease students through the many adjustments demanded by their new setting. Socially, teenagers experience an array of emotions as they leave their familiar lives behind and face trials and uncertainty in their immediate future. Not only must they make new friends and search for commonalities among their peers, often they must get to know their own families, having been separated from them sometimes for years. Newcomer centers should offer a safe, stable environment for students to gather, learn, and socialize without the pressure or self-

consciousness that is potentially present in a standard school setting.

Students arriving in the US with learning gaps based on low-education level or interrupted education are starting their new lives in a pronounced deficit. Becoming proficient in English as well as mastering high-level content learning in all subjects often seems to be an insurmountable task for older newcomers. Some students come with little or no literacy skills and a US school is their first exposure to print. As more and more refugee resettlement programs are established, students with serious learning gaps are faced with the frustrating task of aiming at and missing their constantly moving target – the goal of getting up to speed with the rest of their grade. In these cases, newcomer centers can provide the desperately needed basic literacy focus that students can't do without. Graduation requirements are firmly established and students whose language proficiency hasn't developed enough to master core subject learning will face frustration and loss of confidence. These emotions contribute to the high drop-out rate of teen newcomers as they often feel defeated in the classroom. The social and educational support provided by a newcomer center can go a long way to build a child's sense of accomplishment, promoting the feeling that the student can ultimately succeed in school.

As previously mentioned, refugee resettlement programs are becoming more prevalent as immigrants find asylum in the US from war, gang intimidation, and personal and religious persecution. Many successful newcomer centers have been established throughout the country as a result of these relocation programs, in such cities as Jacksonville, FL, Houston TX, Columbus OH, and St. Paul, MN. Minnesota is now home to the largest Somali and second largest Hmong communities in the U.S. and in St. Paul, older newcomer students spend their learning days in an English Language Center. Here they devote 75% of their time to intensive language classes, much of which provides access to grade-appropriate content learning, and 25% of their day in mainstream elective classes. Over the course of two years these students transition into traditional settings. As any ESOL teacher knows, two years is not enough time to acquire the language proficiency necessary for performance in typical high-school classroom, but the English Language Center allows these high-needs students to acclimate to the cultures of their new communities and academic settings.

Will US schools establish more newcomer centers to accommodate the expanding population of school-age immigrants? Meeting the language-development and academic needs of recent arrivals is the primary goal of ESOL teachers, and it appears as though newcomer centers provide a stable, supportive mooring for these students. State-mandated, high-stakes testing may be one obstacle to their establishment and success, and time will tell if new legislation will clear the way for the growth of newcomer academies. ■

communication. As ambassadors of proper communication, educators become a channel through which learners discover the applicability of language and refute any idea of language as an abstract entity. To effectively complete this task, literacy practitioners must master many concepts and techniques that focus on their students' needs. This article focuses on six of the most common literacy concepts that ESL teachers must consider, namely: (1) background knowledge, (2) reading as a cultural bridge to literacy, (3) language elasticity, (4) interlanguage, (5) language universals, and (6) the silent period. These key concepts are interconnected and complimentary of each other. They are all necessary to create an optimal environment that promotes literacy among English language learners.

Freire and Macedo argue that, "any literacy program should use… the first language, the word universe of the learners, incorporating the culture-specific expressions of their language, their anxieties, fears, demands, and dreams" (Cobb & Kallus, 2011, p. 231). This statement stresses the importance of **background knowledge**, and is harmonious with the theories commonly used in bilingual education programs where students are asked to use their knowledge in their mother tongue (L1) to approach the information taught in the second language (L2) (NABE, 2014). The incorporation of activities that promote the use of background knowledge helps students familiarize with the information being presented.

Reading is one of the activities that provide an effective arena where students can use this background knowledge to acquire their L2. Teaching of reading entails more than teaching how to decipher a text. It requires active engagement and critical thinking on the learner's part. Through the incorporation of effective reading practices, educators can introduce students to the culture and customs of the target language. Moreover, they can help students relate to their cultural context and develop bridges between their prior experience and their new surroundings. Texts are more than written words; they are an opportunity to acquire cultural understanding of the L2 through the strengthening of the L1. As we use language to develop deep understandings of cultural frameworks, we evidence the flexibility of language as a means through which knowledge is obtained.

Language is flexible; it is "a medium that is both controlled by rules and allows creativity" (Cobb & Kallus, 2011, p. 233). Language is not static or set in stone; it is resilient and continues to change throughout the years. Understanding the **elasticity of language** and language learning is critical for ESL literacy practitioners as they determine their teaching practices. Learning a new language should be exciting and flexible. Students

should play with the sounds and the spelling of the words to discover the true essence of the language. Literacy practitioners must not focus instruction on pointing out errors, but on providing a welcoming environment with ample opportunities for students to play with the language (Nunan & Lamb, 1996). This will guarantee that the creative process takes place during the language acquisition or learning period and that students constructively use feedback to develop their language skills. As a means of communication, language elasticity gives students the opportunity to learn from their own mistakes. Instead of requiring students to learn spelling and grammar through rote memorization, literacy professionals must create a classroom environment that promotes critical thinking, individual reasoning, and self-discovery through the elastic use of language. This environment is one that provides students with multiple means of interacting with the language.

When students interact with the L2, language linking becomes the brain's instinctive reaction to find a connection between their native tongue and the target language. It is, thus, normal for students in the beginning and intermediate stages of language development to go through the **interlanguage** phase. This phase denotes the students' initial struggles and self-realization that both languages as interconnected. During this period of transition, misspellings and code switching are likely to happen. Teachers should encourage the use of both languages during the interlanguage phase because it allows students to naturally process all the new information and concepts to which they are being exposed. Teaching strategies that promote interlanguage are fun for students, build their self-confidence, and promote their engagement in class.

In early stages of language learning, the focus should be on vocabulary expansion and the use of cognates. This facilitates making connections between the native and the target language, and helps students identify **language universals,** or patterns that are common to both languages (Baker & Sienkewicz, 2000). "Explicit teaching of grammar and syntax should be done in the later grades" (Cobb & Kallus, 2011, p. 237) because it requires a deeper level of understanding that could frustrate the learner who is not ready for that stage. The universal concept explains that languages are acquired following a logical pattern that begins with the acquisition of language through discovery. This pattern continues gradually by learning the rules of the language at later grades. However, before English language learners begin using the correct rules of grammar, they undergo several learning phases that begin with the **silent period**.

It is common for immigrant students to experience withdrawal, culture shock, and lack of confidence to speak or interact with their peers. This occurs during the initial acclimation stage in which students are getting acquainted with the new environment that is entirely foreign to them. Educators must understand the implications of the silent period and should not push the student into speaking the language. "Teachers need to allow for nonverbal responses from ELLs, especially new language learners" (Cobb & Kallus, 2011, p. 238). This will give them the opportunity to approach the new language at their own terms, which will also lower their affective filter. When students are ready to exit the silent period, they will do so. Meanwhile, the educator must facilitate activities that promote silent literacy.

The process of acquisition and learning of a language has many implications and varies by individuals. The six concepts –background knowledge, reading as a cultural bridge to literacy, language elasticity, interlanguage, language universals, and the silent period– provide a brief insight about some of the most important factors to consider when teaching literacy to ESL learners. It is highly important for literacy practitioners to understand these implications and to continue seeking knowledge on how to support their pupils during this exciting moment in their lives. This article pretends to integrate concepts that may seem unrelated to ESL teaching but this is only a first take on these six concepts for ESL literacy practitioners. This work invites to further analyze the existing interrelationship between the six principles and other specific underline concepts as it relates to ESL instruction.

References

Baker, C., & Sienkewicz, A. (2000). *The care and education of young bilinguals: An*

introduction for professionals. Clevedon [England: Multilingual Matters.

Cobb, J. B, & Kallus, M. K. (2011). Historical, Theoretical, and Sociological Foundations of Reading in the United States. Boston, MA: Pearson.

National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) website (2014). What is Bilingual Education? Retrieved from http://www.nabe.org/BilingualEducation

Nunan, D., & Lamb, C. (1996). The self-directed teacher: Managing the learner process. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. ■

MARYLAND
TESOL NEWS

MARYLAND TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES

www.marylandtesol.org