



Fall 2016

MARYLAND TESOL NEWS

Maryland Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages



Message from the Editors...

Welcome back! Welcome back teachers, instructors and professors of English as a Second Language. Welcome back from teaching summer school, around-the-world adventures, working on an advanced degree, working at the local pool, restaurant, seasonal business, being with your own children or relaxing at home. Welcome to your new numbers, numbers that have increased perhaps 3 percent since last year and will continue to grow each month. Welcome to students from places like Syria, Afghanistan, Nepal, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and others. Welcome to new and not-so-new strategies; the SIOP method, Cluster Groupings, the Keyword Method and CALLA. MD TESOL wishes you a great academic year and hopes to help you hone your skills and network with you colleagues at this year's Fall Conference on November 12th at Howard Community College. We hope to celebrate your past achievements while inspiring you to take the journey ever farther. Welcome back!

by Billie Muñoz and Angel Toledo-Lopez, Editors

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Message from the President

Welcome to another promising year at Maryland TESOL! As I write this column, we are in the final stages of preparing for what promises to be one of our best ever Fall Conferences, and I hope all reading this are taking advantage of the wonderful opportunities that offers. But Maryland TESOL has even more to offer. Over the course of the coming year, we have made our goal to look outward – to engage with the membership and the community and act as a catalyst to TESOL activities in Maryland as a whole. I urge you to get involved with this!

There are several ways you can do this. First, on your membership form, identify for Maryland TESOL the interest section(s) that are of greatest relevance to you. But don't stop there! Contact the chair of the interest section, volunteer your services and share your ideas for activities. Watch for events sponsored by those interest sections and participate in these. Together, we can build sub-communities of people connected by common interest. As the interest groups become more active in the general community, participants will have opportunities for service, networking and professional development. We welcome your voice and enthusiasm! I look forward to working with each of you over the course of the year to make the TESOL network in Maryland more active and vibrant than ever.

Best wishes,

Karen Blinder



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Teaching in Northern Thailand, Summer 2016

by Esther Robbins, Chair of Language Studies, Prince George's Community College

During the summers of 2014 & 2015, I spent a month each year teaching EFL in Koltsovo, Siberia (as part of the Mini American Summer School program). This past summer of 2016 was a new teaching experience for me in the rural Sob Moh Primary School outside of Lampang, Thailand.



Perhaps you are thinking that I opted for Thailand over Siberia to get away from the cold weather, but Koltsovo in June and July experiences summer just like Maryland does. I experienced 90 degree weather in Siberia, and the same again in Thailand!

Lampang is about 370 miles north of Bangkok and 62 miles south-east of Chiang Mai. It is the third largest town in northern Thailand with a population of approximately 225,000. Lampang is also called "Mueang Rot Ma" which in Thai means "Horse Carriage City" and tourists can still find the horse-drawn carriages in regular use for transportation. Lampang is not crowded with "tuk tuks" (the famous three wheeled motorcycle -taxis of Bangkok),but uses "song taos" instead for public transportation (like oversized tuk-tuks; they can carry between 6-12 passengers in the bench lined backs of these open-sided vehicles and fares must be negotiated in advance) as well as buses, trains, and cars of course. Lampang is well known for the Thai Elephant Conversation Center nearby Chae Son National Park as well as numerous temples (Wats). Finally, Lampang is quite renowned for its ceramics. Many of these bowls, cups and plates are adorned with a white rooster (and rooster statues are found all around Lampang).



(“Thailand” Continued...)

I was given a house to live in for my summer stay in Lampang. As a surprise to a Marylander, it was also occupied by numerous “ting cho” (small lizards who –on the plus side—eat mosquitoes, and who—on the minus side—poop on the walls. Additionally they ‘bark’, which is a plus or a minus depending on your personal take on the sound).I also had “duk keh” or gekkos that got rather large, and one startling visit –inside the house—from a huntsman spider!



Aside from the excitement of the household wildlife, what struck me most about school life in Thailand were three things: the integration of the outside world with the inside world in our rural school setting (not uncommon for tropical settings) the regular interactions of students regardless of age and the fact that in Thailand, students were much more involved in the regular daily upkeep of their schools than many students here in the U.S.A.

There was no AC, so classroom windows were always open; when a storm rolled in, students rushed to help close the shutters and they did the same at the end of every school day with no prompting. Many buildings were open air ones, such as the room in which we ate lunch alongside our students. After lunch we all (even the ‘anu ban’ or kindergarten students) washed our own pressed-metal plates at a series of outdoor sinks. First the soapy sink, then the next rinse sink and the last final clean rinse sink. *The final rinse sink was not as clean as many of us might have liked (soap bubbles, the odd grain of rice, and a fly or two seemed to wind up there –unsurprising after 150 students had done their washing, no?), but that is what our immune systems and the antibiotics we have packed along for the trip are for, right?



("Thailand" Continued...)

Before school started every morning, announcements were made to the entire school, outside on the black-top, and all ages participated in school-wide physical exercises in addition to agreeably doing the work of sweeping the walkways and watering the school compound's many plants before settling down to sit in classrooms and study. Finally, after lunch, the entire school gathered to chant Buddhist prayers together in another open-walled hall before returning to class; the sound of the chanting wafted across the school property. The end result of these group-oriented activities was a feeling of camaraderie that is not often achieved in American public schools.

For anyone possibly interested in pursuing a similar experience in Thailand, I was teaching in association with Teach Thailand Corps/Yonok Foundation which places teachers in Thailand's public schools for ten month stretches. I met several dozen of these teachers while I was there when I conducted a one day Teacher Training for them in downtown Lampang. Most of the TTC teachers were in their early to mid-twenties, and seemed to me to have joined TTC with something akin to a 'Peace Corps spirit'; many were recent college graduates who had not yet settled on their next step in life and were not necessarily ESL/EFL teachers by training. From what I experienced, and from what I learned from all of them, they were having the time of their lives!



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The 2016 TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit: Resources, Reflections, and Updates

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

On June 19-21, 2016, I joined approximately 75 other TESOL educators and members of TESOL International Association in Washington, DC for the 2016 TESOL Advocacy & Policy Summit. The program featured a full a day of issue briefings and activities around education legislation and advocacy, followed by a day of visits to Congressional offices on Capitol Hill. With representatives from approximately 30 US affiliates in attendance, the goals of the Summit were not only to learn more about federal policy issues impacting TESOL educators and English learners, but also to provide an interactive learning experience for participants on elements of advocacy. By the end of the event, TESOL members had visited the offices of over 100 Representatives and Senators.

To fully prepare for the Summit, participants needed to complete several important tasks before arriving in Washington, DC. For example, participants needed to schedule meetings with their Congressional representatives. For many, this was a first. To assist with this, TESOL International Association provided directions, guidance, and a list of specific representatives and senators to contact. Additionally, TESOL International Association connected attendees with other participants from the same state to encourage collective advocacy. When scheduling an appointment with a Congressional representative, it is best to start requesting appointment dates two to three months in advance to allow enough time for a response and scheduling. Many educators could not schedule a meeting with their Congressional representative due to conflicting schedules and short-notice appointments. However, participants who did not have a scheduled appointment joined other participants from their home states in their meeting with the Congressional representatives.

Participants also received background information on key policy issues so that they could begin to familiarize themselves in advance. To help make their Congressional meetings more effective, participants were encouraged to find examples from their own programs to illustrate the talking points they would use in their meetings. For example, during our presentations we learned information about the new law of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed on December 10th, 2015 with the purpose of replacing the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. In this law we see an evolution of the terms used to refer to English Language Learners. In the past laws the term English Limited Proficiency (ELP) was commonly used, which was replaced by English Language Learners (ELLs), and in ESSA English Learners (ELs) is the new term coined. In addition to this, ESSA offers a new definition for ELs, which became a common talking point at our appointments. ESSA defines the term EL as “an individual who, among other things, has difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language that may be sufficient to deny the individual the ability to meet challenging state academic standards” (CCSSO, 2016, p. 13).

“When scheduling an appointment with a Congressional representative, it is best to start requesting appointment dates two to three months in advance...”

(Summit Continued...)

The Summit featured a keynote from Dr. Johan Uvin, Acting Assistant Secretary for Career, Technical, and Adult Education at the U.S. Department of Education. In addition, representatives from the Office for Civil Rights and the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) at the U.S. Department of Education, as well as the Student & Exchange Visitor Program at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, each presented updates from their offices. The Summit also included presentations from the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and author Dr. Diane Staehr Fenner presented information from her book *Advocating for English Learners: A Guide for Educators*. All the briefings provided a lot of information about new trends in the ESL field, new and future policies, as well as resources for leaders in the ESL field. For example, we learned about the Performance Partnership Pilot (P3) Grant, a federal program whose mission focuses on providing grants to educators to test innovative, outcome-focused strategies to achieve significant improvements in educational, employment, and other key outcomes for disconnected youth. Also, we learned about the new push for an integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program, which may become a reality in future years to come.

Following these briefings, the Summit shifted its focus to advocacy with preparations for meetings with members of Congress. Half of our second day was devoted to networking and learning about strategies to ask questions to our Congress representatives and staying on subject during our meetings. To maximize the impact of the Summit, key members of Congress serving on the education and appropriations committees in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives were identified for meetings. In addition, participants attending from the same state were teamed up so they could meet with the legislators in small groups. On June 21, the last day of the summit, participants went to Capitol Hill to have meetings with members of Congress and staff.

At the end of the day, the participants shared their experiences and what they learned over dinner. It was interesting to hear what other people experienced on their visit. Overall, all of the participants agreed this event was a very positive experience for them and for TESOL International Association. The 2016 TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit was an excellent event full of leaders in the ESL field and the information taught was all new and innovative. I highly recommend the yearly TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit and I hope everyone has the opportunity to experience this professionally-enriching event.

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First in a Series - Students Find Success After ESOL

The following is a snapshot of the life of Diana, a student from El Salvador who was a pupil of Board Member Luis Pentón at Laurel High School. We seek to support and encourage ESOL teachers of all levels to continue their important work transforming lives. Please send us the story of one or more of YOUR students (along with a photo) in the form of an interview, their own stories written by themselves or your observations of their lives to designated MDTESOL newspaper editors, Billie Muñoz and Ángel Toledo-López at newsletter@mdtesol.org. We will send a confirmation.



How ESOL Class Has Changed My Life

by *Diana Cartagena, Student*

Hi everyone, my name is Diana Cartagena and I am an English language learner from El Salvador. I want to tell you a bit about how the ESOL classes have changed my life. On my first day of school I was a little nervous because I did not know any English. I remember telling my mom that I wanted to go to school as soon as we arrived in the United States, but I did not know I was going to be so nervous. My first experience on my first day of school was going into the bus; I was so nervous walking in and when the bus driver greeted I did not know what to say. I remember that my first day of school was horrible because I did not understand anything. I felt alone because everyone

around me was speaking English and I could not communicate. I was frustrated because I could not speak and I did not have any friends.

When I started the ESOL classes my attitude towards school and how I felt in school changed completely. In my ESOL classes teachers teach in a way where all of us feel included and each student can learn. In my ESOL classes I feel like I am at home, I feel safe in a place where I am learning a new language surrounded by other students whom I consider my friends. ESOL classes have changed my life in many ways and they have given me more opportunities in this country to help me reach my goals. Each of my ESOL teachers has been very important in my growth as a learner and as an ESOL student. I believe that my ESOL teachers' dedication, time, and classes have made a big impact in my life.

I want to leave a message to every ESOL student... Never feel bad because you cannot speak English. In life, there is always a first time for everything and learning English is just another challenge that can be conquered. I arrived to the United States knowing no English and today I am proud to say that I am bilingual and I am succeeding in my studies. If I was able to make my dreams a reality, so can you.

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What Works: Get to Know your Students, Let your Students Know You!

by Tabitha Kidwell

TESOL professionals know how important it is to build strong relationships with our students. We are accustomed to getting to know them by asking about their families, interests, and lives outside of class. We might not realize, however, how important it is to also share about ourselves! Recent research by Hunter Gelbach and colleagues at Harvard University revealed just how important relationships between teachers and students can be. They gave ninth-grade students and teachers a survey, then showed some of the teachers and students the responses they had in common. They found that the students who knew they had something in common with their teachers actually started to perform better in class. Most notably, this effect was strongest for minority students! This means that teachers can foster a close relationship by showing students what they have in common. Doing so has the potential to increase student achievement.

To hear more about Dr. Gelbach's study, check out the recent NPR story here:

<http://www.npr.org/2015/10/13/444446708/in-the-classroom-common-ground-can-transform-gpas>).

Below are some activity ideas to help your students get to know you a little better. They are also great opportunities to practice language!

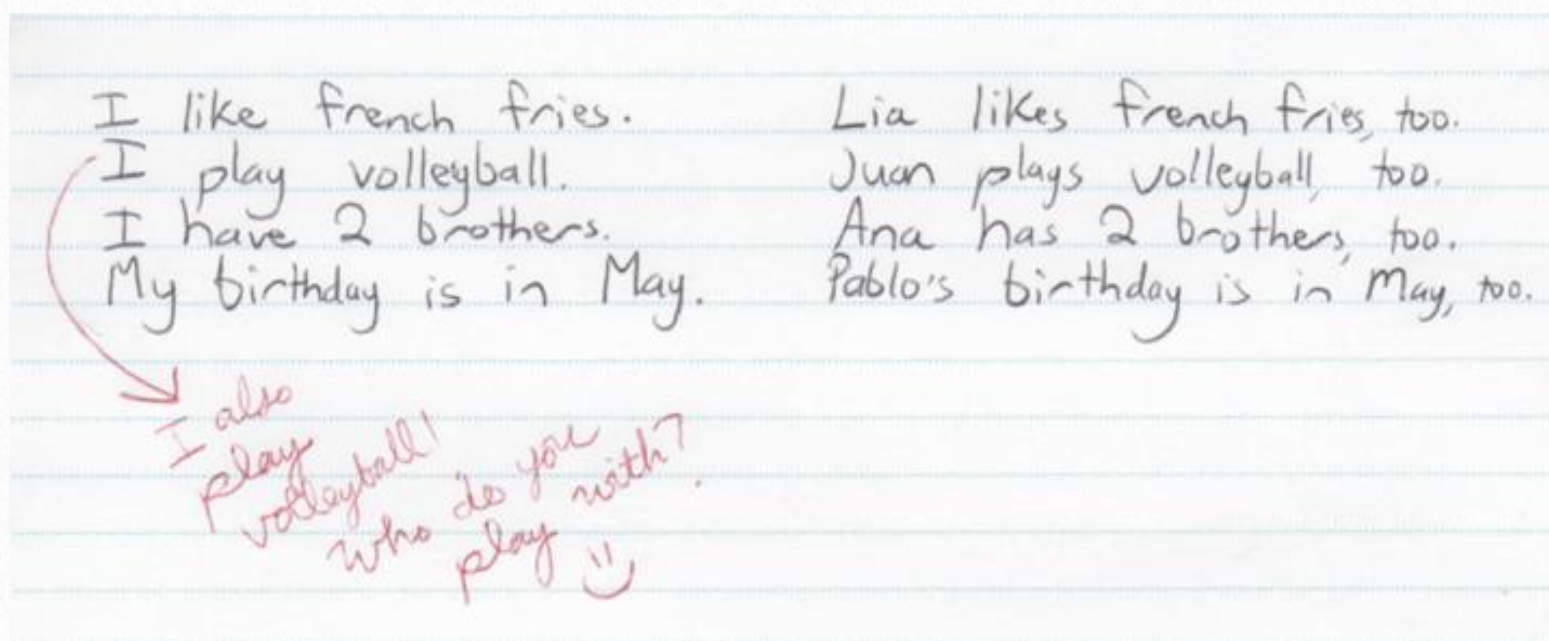
Activity 1: Common Ground

For this activity, place students in small groups of 3 to 4, and ask each group to make a list of things they have in common, for example eye color, shoe sizes, or gender. Encourage them to seek unusual things they have in common, too, like enjoying rainy days, disliking vanilla ice cream, or being afraid of clowns. The groups will have 15 minutes to make their lists, and when time is up, each group will present their list to the class. The group with the most items in common wins. To maximize student-teacher relationship building, be sure to also tell students about which items they have in common with you! Follow up and ask them about those topics later on.

Activity 2: Someone Like You

This activity practices all four skills and can be adapted for any skill level or topic. First, ask students to write a number of sentences about themselves. For beginners, this might be as simple as "I'm 17 years old" or "I like French fries." For advanced students, you could build off recent readings or class discussions, for instance by asking them to write about what they were like as children or what 10 experiences would be on their bucket list. Then, students practice speaking by asking other students if the sentences are true for them, for example, "Do you like French fries?" or "Is skydiving on your bucket list?" This is a great opportunity to practice transforming sentences into questions. When another student says yes, they write a sentence about that student, for instance, "Lia likes French fries, too" or "Mario also wants to skydive." The first student to find someone who has each sentence in common with them is the winner. To get the most out of this activity, you should collect students' papers and comment on them – hopefully you can find something you have in common with each student. Then, return the papers to students so they can see what they have in common with their teacher.

Example: Activity 2 (If necessary)



Activity 3: Lie detector

This is an especially good activity after a vacation or long weekend. Give students time to each write down a question they would like to ask you. Give a few examples: “What is the strangest dream you have ever had?” or “What food do you miss when you travel?” If the class is full of confident speakers and you have a trusting environment, you can have them ask their questions out loud themselves. If some students might feel embarrassed to ask the question they wrote, you could have them swap questions so they each are asking another student’s question. If you worry that some students might ask a question you don’t want to answer, you could collect the questions and read them aloud yourself before answering. Answer all the questions, except one, truthfully; for one question, you should lie. The students have to guess which answer was a lie, and give reasons to justify their opinion. You might be surprised to learn what students already know (or think they know) about you!

There are many more ways you can show students what you share in common. You can use yourself as an example when you model activities. You can attend athletic events, concerts, or cultural events at your school or in the community. You can include plenty of time in class for natural, open dialogue. The activities above are just intended to spark your creativity regarding this important teaching practice. Hopefully you have gained some ideas to help you build stronger relationship with your students!

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Tabitha Kidwell is a doctoral student in the Applied Linguistics and Language Education program at University of Maryland, College Park. She has taught students of all ages and levels on five continents. Her research interest is the effective preparation of novice language teachers.

Higher Education ESOL Students and Information Literacy

by Adrienne Betancourt Nicosia

Six “threshold concepts, recommended by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), guide instructional librarians in their mission to improve students’ information literacy skills (“Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education”). Replacing a behavior or end-result based approach, the concepts refer to the essential knowledge college students need to skillfully use sources. Students step over the “threshold” or through the door into the light of realization and lasting understanding. Threshold concepts are informative when preparing students to succeed in American academia. This article examines threshold concepts from the perspective of TESOL. ESOL instructors can do much to add an extra layer of cultural and language knowledge and skills so students can benefit from the instruction their composition teachers give all students about using outside sources.

“Information Has Value” Threshold Concept

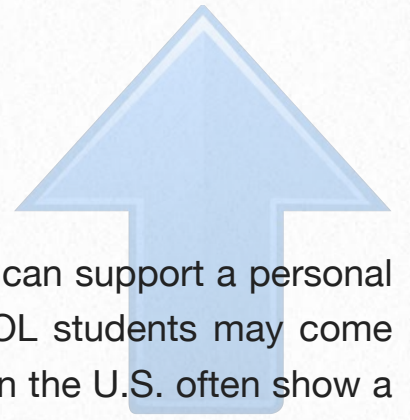
In spite of recent expansion of open-source materials and the notion of an information commons, U.S. higher education still highly values ownership of ideas, with sometimes dire punitive consequences for plagiarism. But this “intellectual property” perspective is not universal (Heitman, Elizabeth, and Sergio Litewka). In their home countries, ESOL students may have learned different ways of incorporating other’s ideas (Keenan, Christine and Peter Jemmeson). College composition classes address plagiarism, but TESOL teachers can directly discuss expectations particular to the U.S (“Cultural Perspectives on Plagiarism”). Moreover, students who attended U.S. high schools should have practiced quotation, summary and paraphrase, acquiring facility with alternative vocabulary and syntax that is especially challenging for ESOL students. Last, accurate paraphrase is impossible without comprehension. ESOL students can benefit from direct instruction in reading college texts bolstered by ESOL scaffolding.



“Searching as Strategic Exploration” Threshold Concept

Academic librarians guide use of search engines because students often try ineffectual key words. Struggle due to terminology and language barriers is more commonly seen with international students (Martin, Charity K. et. al.). ESOL students may be less familiar with multiple meanings of words, more likely to bring up the wrong sources, and less likely to get back on track when using library databases. This can result in frustration. Effective strategies for finding the right key words include building English academic vocabulary within different contexts or disciplines.

(Continued from Higher Education...)



“Authority is Constructed and Contextual”

The definition of “valid” authority is highly contextual. While direct experiences can support a personal narrative, sources by “appropriate” authorities are required for research papers. ESOL students may come from cultures with a different view of and response to authorities. Students educated in the U.S. often show a level of social familiarity with their professors surprising to ESOL students from countries where teachers are revered and/or feared. The U.S. is a mixed bag (Hetherington, Marc J. and Jonathan D. Weiler). While some Americans eschew deference to royalty and titles, others value the Biblical “Higher Authority,” for example. The cultural relativism prevalent in most non-sectarian universities may also be puzzling. What do you mean “truth is relative”?!

Finally, the expertise and reliability and biases of authors are often not readily apparent, especially to ESOL students who may more easily miss subtle cues in author’s tone or fail to understand clues about perspective and partisanship. Famous and commonly-known authorities in certain disciplines may be unknown to ESOL students.

“Information Creation as a Process”

Understanding how source material information has been acquired, gathered, constructed, reviewed, published, and sometimes censored is crucial to discerning fiction from factual information (Nolan, Markham). This concept overlaps with the one about authority; validity can be related to the process the author has followed. ESOL students arriving in the U.S. for college may lack familiarity with the constructed nature of various print and online sources and not realize why U.S. professors place high value on vetted articles often only accessible via the deep web or pay-for-access databases (Meola, Marc). American high schoolers become acquainted, in the media center, with online encyclopedias and .gov and .edu sites as well as other educationally approved and reviewed resources, learning to recognize that tabloid magazines and bizarre web stories are of a different nature. The commercial association of many websites may be more apparent to U.S.-educated students because the branding of major corporations pops out. The U.S. is not free from government, school-district, and other more subtle forms of censorship, and does have an “alternative media” (“What Is Censorship?”). Thus, ESOL students can learn much about the process by which text is created and published in our society as compared to their home countries.

“Scholarship as Conversation”

“Scholarship as Conversation” emphasizes the continually developing , back-and-forth dialogue that scholars conduct to explore and sometimes overturn notions about currently-held ideas (Fister, Barbara). ESOL students may be puzzled by the adversarial nature of some important aspects of U.S. culture (ex. our peculiar legal system). U.S. higher education requires mere undergraduates to practice evaluating and sometimes countering the ideas of professors and published authorities. In addition, U.S. college writing requires use of vocabulary and phrases that reflect a transparent, assertive yet modest, persuasive yet not strident tone. This is a higher level of English that ESOL students will need to be taught with models and practice. ESOL students may need to learn appropriate, respectful language to respond, critically, to their classmates’ ideas when the class is discussing controversial issues.

(Continues from Higher Education...)

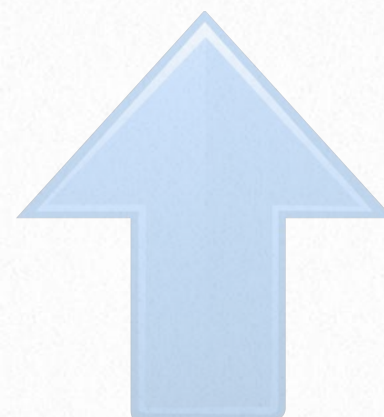
“Research as Inquiry”

“Research as Inquiry” is another threshold concept outside the cultural expectations of some ESOL students. Many U.S. K – 12 teachers value individual inquiry and curiosity, encouraging even toddlers to speak up, ask endless questions, and think for themselves, rather than take the status quo as established or be “seen and not heard” (Kuhlthau, Carol Collier). The notion that research into old ideas can result in students formulating brand new realizations about the world can seem particularly “foreign.” That our “knowledge” is always growing and changing and not static or already established, and that our job as students is to play with hypotheses, is not assumed in all parts of the Earth (or some reactionary U.S communities.)

In conclusion, the six ACRL threshold concepts provide a useful schemata for instructors preparing lessons for their ESOL students working towards academic research requirements.

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Adrienne Betancourt Nicosia (Master's in TESOL) is a staff member at Montgomery College, Maryland, Writing, Reading, and Language Center and works with faculty-tutors, instructors, and classes. She works one-on-one with students and collaborates with instructional librarians on workshops for students about academic integrity, finding sources, and creating citations. She has taught composition to native and non-native speakers of English.

New, Freely Available, Professional Development Materials for Teachers of Adult English Language Learners

With the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)'s emphasis on the importance of preparing all adults for employment, it is more important than ever that instructors, instructor educators, program administrators, professional development specialists, and policy makers work together to ensure that we are meeting the needs of English language learners (ELLs) of all levels. One way to do this is by expanding and building the capacity of our adult education teachers, improving their ESL instruction.

There are three new suites of evidence-based resources to support adult ESL practitioners:

- Meeting the Language Needs of Today's Adult English Language Learner. These resources address the gap between current ESL programming and expectations associated with job and postsecondary training. They also cover other settings that might involve complex texts and tasks, such as GED, employment, and engagement within the community.
- Integrating Digital Literacy into English Language Instruction. These resources present the importance of integrating technology and increasing digital literacy in a variety of English language learning environments. They highlight the role of technology and digital literacy in enhancing learning opportunities and provide relevant strategies for the ESL classroom.
- Preparing English Learners for Work and Career Pathways. These resources highlight current, effective instructional models of integrating vocational training with academic instruction. They demonstrate key concepts in integrating academic skill development across many ESL levels to assist with learners' transition to postsecondary education in preparation for work.

The suites, developed through OCTAE's LINCS ESL Pro project, can be found here: <http://lincs.ed.gov/programs/eslpro>

What the field is saying about the LINCS ESL Pro resources:

"The materials were very clear and well organized. I now finally understand what WIOA and Career Pathways is all about."

"As an ESL instructor, I found many ideas and suggestions in this unit [Unit 3 of the Professional Development module] very helpful. There was some great advice for dealing with real life scenarios at work."

All three suites include tools to help teachers in their work with ESL students and provide program administrators with guidance for decision making at the program level. These resources include:

- Research briefs that provide evidence-based background information that is helpful to have before completing the modules or reading the companion learning resources.
- Online professional development modules that include a combination of audio, video, quizzes, interactive activities, sample ESL lesson plans, and guidelines for program-based implementation. Although the modules are designed to be self-paced, teachers are encouraged to work through them with other teachers and/or administrators from their program, as a cohort.
- Companion learning resources that use a digital magazine-format to provide examples of instructional models, strategies, tools, and tasks teachers can implement in their classrooms.

Also available is access to open educational resources (OER) teachers can use to enhance their instructional practice to improve student learning.

ELL professionals and stakeholders interested in advancing the field can also search the LINCS resource collection for high-quality instructional resources in 15 topic areas by visiting <http://lincs.ed.gov/professional-development/resource-collections>.

Using Smartphones with Adult ELLs

by Jose V. Torres

There is no denying smartphones have become extensions of ourselves in modern society. Many of us in the teaching profession have embraced the technological evolution with some reservations. For Millennials, it's difficult to recall a time without a phone in hand. Many probably wonder how we even survived in the "old days" before cell phones. In truth, most people throughout the world have access to seemingly limitless information with the



swipe of a finger and a push of a button. The question is if technology has been integrated into every aspect of education. Why hasn't this "leap" in accessibility translated into more innovative students and higher test scores? The smartphone is a device almost everybody has possession of and yet it is likely the least utilized resource in education today. Tablets are also part of the modern family and often function like smartphones only with more features. However tablets, too, have had very limited use in the ELL classroom. The integration of these devices into the classroom as a tool is slow at best, and that may stem from a reluctance to view them as "tools" in the first place by instructors in general.

In all of the adult ESL classes I have taught since 2009, nearly all of my students have had smartphones—even those who arrived in the country only a few weeks. With more and more education apps becoming available with everything from English grammar to listening drills to watching videos, the smartphone is by far the most underutilized resource we have as educators of adult learners. Until the next big technological leap, smartphones are likely to remain a necessity for nearly everyone. Why not try to have students use them for things other than pictures, texting, social media and games? Educators often do not even realize smartphones can also be an extension of their classrooms and tools for reviewing previous lessons.

There are several ways instructors can utilize smartphones in instruction. It may take some creativity because different proficiency levels require various strategies, but ultimately there are some proven ways to make an impact using smartphones.

1. Audio using a podcast. Recording parts of a lesson, modeled conversations or vocabulary words to help students with practicing pronunciations is a valuable way for instructors to help students. Using a podcast app (such as Podbean and Podcast Republic) is a simple way to record, upload and share audio recordings with students. There are many podcast sites available for free, and some have a small fee to use them. Honestly, if your class includes various listening activities and drills, conversation pieces and vocabulary, then having a podcast is an economical and practical way to have students access important audio activities. Another thing to consider is once you post these audio components, you can use them again and again with different classes.

2. Video using Youtube. Youtube is one of the most popular video streaming sites in the world. Everyone is familiar with its format and it is likely you have already shown material on Youtube to your students at some point. It is especially easy to post videos on Youtube and share them. For instructors who are not camera shy, making a video of a lesson and posting it on Youtube is an effective way to share crucial aspects of your class that can be reviewed as many times as students need to at their convenience.

3. File/Document sharing. Uploading files (such as worksheets) in pdf format to the cloud is great for instructors to have access to and print later, but have you ever shared files with others? If you have a Google account, you can upload files to your Google Drive and then share them with others, including students. Other sites like Dropbox also allow for sharing files using email addresses and granting people access to certain files. Most smartphones already come with apps capable of reading pdf files and various different file formats, and several free apps are available on Google Play and the Apple Store to give students file reading capability on their smartphone.

4. Translators. Sites such as Google Translate and freetranslation.com offer fairly accurate translations for a multitude of languages. This is especially useful when learning abstract vocabulary words, verbs, and words with interchangeable parts of speech. Students can use their smartphones to translate vocabulary words, phrases and even whole sentences into their native language, but a frequent complaint is translators aren't always accurate. However, if you are working with individual words, accuracy improves. When you attempt to translate whole sentences, the translations can even be quite comical. The silver lining is students can get a better grasp of content if they translate problematic words that cannot be easily referenced with objects in the classroom or pictures.

Perhaps instructors themselves pose the greatest challenge for the integration of smartphones in the classrooms. When working with adult students, the rules are different. It's not like in public schools with children; adults are more likely to use smartphones for activities related to lessons taught in class if instructors assign them "homework." Some students are very motivated and will use every available resource they have to help them learn English. Having access to lesson materials on their smartphone presents many opportunities for them to practice their English. Student incitement may lead to more instructors being motivated to make these smartphone-teacher-generated resources available to them. It does take a little time and effort, but just as we instructors love to remind students, "You will get out what you put in."

Jose V. Torres is the author of the textbook "I Want To Learn English" and an adult ESL instructor at Baltimore City Community College. He has been working with adult beginner ELLs for many years and encourages students and fellow instructors to use their smartphones with class assignments. Jose's work is ongoing and updates can be found at www.iwtle.com.

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